

Ri utzilaj K'aslemälil richin ri winaqi´ Abya Yala

Intercultural Health: Perspectives from the Indigenous and Afro-Descendent Peoples of Abya Yala

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EL DELITO MAS GRANDE
DE NUESTROS PADRES ES
ENDER SUS DERECHO Y EL
URO DE NOSOTROS
S DE SAN JUAN SA
PRESENTE









PROLOGUE

We want to live another history!

Five years ago we attended the birth of the International Peoples' Health University (IPHU), a university full of life and dreams, of open space for new ideas and proposals, for sharing, coming together, and building roads to freedom, dignity, and health.

The first session of the IPHU was held at the University of Cuenca Medical School in Ecuador, marking a historic milestone. Participants included researchers, academics, social activists, and grassroots leaders from 18 countries who had enthusiastically and joyfully responded to the initiative and invitation from the International Peoples' Health Council (IPHC).

Since that July in 2005, the IPHU has contributed to strengthening grassroots health movements around the world. Numerous events, debates, conferences, seminars, and short courses have been held on every continent.

In April 2010, Chimaltenango, Guatemala was the site of a new session of the International Peoples' Health University. Sixty-five representatives of the indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples of Abya Yala* embarked on a significant departure from other 'academic' events— two weeks of feeling and sharing what it means to live in harmony, in balance among men and women, among representatives of diverse communities, among people, among one and another, among humans and nature, among diversity and the Utopia of a unique world of solidarity.

Jaime and Dominique and the ComunicándoNOS** Team—Jorge, Silvina, Patricio, and Santiago—from the Peoples' Health Movement-Latin America enable us to re-experience the multicolour diversity of our reality and help us to visualize paths of hope in the midst of the dark panorama imposed by elites and hegemonic groups.

At the same time, they invite us to assume a reflective stance and to be on guard for 'intercultural' rhetoric about the 'preservation' of traditional indigenous medicine, combined with aggressively pushing the consumer culture, the exploitation and destruction of the environment, and a quest for exorbitant profits for transnational power groups, which have nothing to do with the ancestral knowledge of our peoples and their sense of belonging to nature.

The authors show us through their reporting, enriched by people's own stories, photos, and interviews, that reducing the contribution of native peoples to their rituals, music, markings on their bodies, or their colourful costumes is to empty it of content and deny the depth of their discourse and their courage in defending their cultures and lives.

Thus, we have this new book, thanks to the sensitivity and social commitment of its authors, who took on the tough task of gathering many grains of maize to put new spring into our step, so we can continue walking forward and building hope, as Bety Cariño explains next, from the bottom up and from the left, the side the heart is on.

* Abya Yala is a Kuna (indigenous people of Panama and Colombia) term meaning land in its full maturity, which is used to denominate the entirety of the Americas.

** Something like Communicating OURSELVES.

Arturo Quizhpe P.
María Hamlin Z.

IN HOMAGE

The Peoples' Health Movement-Latin America (PHM-LA) and the Guatemala International Peoples' Health University (IPHU-G) dedicate this book to the memory of all the men and women in the Americas who gave their lives defending our Mother Earth.

We also want to convey the voices in unison of imprisoned indigenous and rural people from Mesoamerica—Maya, Mixtec, Miskito, Afro-descendent, and mestizo—who have been unjustly jailed and accused of terrorism simply because they wanted to defend their right to choose their own ways of life.

In Guatemala, the Peoples' Health Movement (PHM) also wants to be the voice to the world of Crisanta, a women hiding from an arrest warrant and terror and death, without breaking; the voice of the people of San Juan Sacatepéquez who are being brutally repressed; and of María Fidelia, who lost her son Inmar Orlando, murdered by bullets from the cement company with the support of those who are on the side of exploitation by the mining companies.

We also want to honour Bety Cariño, a Mixtec leader who was killed alongside others during the Observation Caravan on 27 April 2010, cowardly ambushed in San Juan Copalá, Oaxaca, Mexico.

And what greater homage to Mother Earth than Bety Cariño's own words, written shortly before the brutal murder that cut short her life and drenched the Earth with her life force and the fruits that will come from the dignity and struggle of our peoples:

My Brothers and Sisters,

My feet firmly on the ground, head held high, dignified, a cool head and ardent heart.

Through my voice speaks the voice of my Ñusabi brothers and sisters, off in rebellious Oaxaca, in that great country called Mexico. I cannot talk about myself without talking about the others, because I exist only if they exist. So, I speak as 'we'.

We women, who are daughters, sisters and mothers, friends, teachers, indigenous, Mixtecs, Oaxacans, Mexicans, defenders, communicators; we are leading our people in protest against the ravaging of our Mother Earth for the gain of large multinational corporations and Big Finance.

Today, the legitimate yearnings for social justice of the Mexican Revolution live on in our voices, in our struggles, in our hands. Our struggle is the same as the one Morelos led two hundred years ago. It is the same fight Magón and Zapata waged a hundred years ago. And in Mexico today, it is the struggle of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)—a struggle that has cost the lives of

thousands of Mexicans, all of them the poor, underdogs who were fighting, and their place in history continues to be the sidelines and oblivion.

Today, young people, native peoples, and women are at the forefront of this catastrophe. Free trade agreements, through the complicity of our bad government, have meant that our countryside is now the backdrop to ruin and disaster, the victim of indiscriminate liberalization of trade, of genetically modified organisms, of transnational ambition that has begat huge mining ventures, great wind farms, large dams generating electricity for other people, but never for us, the true owners of these lands. Their fibre optics carries the light elsewhere.

Today we want to tell you that all of this has brought on the forced migration of millions and millions of our sisters and brothers, who, as my grandmother used to say, have to leave in order to be able to remain.

In Mexico, as native peoples we continue to be denied our right to autonomy, our right to exist; but now we want to live a different history. We are rebelling and we are saying: Enough! Right now, right here, we want to tell you that they are afraid of us because we are not afraid of them. Because, despite their threats and their slander, their harassment, we continue to walk toward a sun that, in our opinion, is shining brightly. We think that the time for we, the people, the time for we, the non-submissive women, and the time for the underdogs is coming. The 500-year-long night is not over yet. The Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa María now bear the names IBERDROLA, ENDESA, and GAMESA.

Now, discontent is racing across our nation. This is why there is no time to waste for women to step up and get involved in defending human rights every single day.

We want to build a world with justice and dignity, without any kind of discrimination whatsoever. We are now pursuing an intensive, wide-ranging process of organization, mobilization, analysis, discussion, and consensus, which is helping us to build a world that holds many other worlds.

We, as men and women, are the outcome of many struggles; we carry the warrior legacy of our grandmothers in our blood; our roots demand this of ourselves, and our daughters cry it out to us.

Brothers, sisters: let us open our hearts like the flower awaiting the sun's morning rays. Let us sow dreams and harvest hope, remembering that this building can only happen from the bottom up and from the left, the side the heart is on.

Betty Cariño





A CHIMALTENANGO WELCOME



From the heart of Guatemala, a land weaving its future out of volcanoes and lakes, tropical jungles, and ancient temples, the Maya people, with their ancestral knowledge and history of defending life, prepare to open the International Peoples' Health University (IPHU) course, 'Intercultural Health: Perspectives from the Indigenous and Afro-Descendent Peoples of Abya Yala.'

The staff and faculty are putting on the finishing touches at ASECSA—the Guatemalan Association of Community Health Services—where the course will be held. The sacred fire will soon be lit, to accompany the students, facilitators, and guests from around Latin America for ten days of information sharing, discussions, and debate, and to warm them and enliven their minds, hearts, and spirits.

The ceremony to open the course and welcome participants is set for the early morning hours of Thursday, 15 April, when we will thank the Nahual Kawoq and connect our energies with his. It will mark the dawn of a day ripe for planting and for awakening the children of Ru'ux Ulew or Pachamama, our Mother Earth. The ceremony will be the roots of a tree that must grow unceasingly, because only fruit that nourishes the future can provide the rationale for life and its harmonious continuity with nature and all its living creatures.





The IPHU-Guatemala begins

Following the official opening of the IPHU course, 'Intercultural Health: Perspectives from the Indigenous and Afro-Descendent Peoples of Abya Yala,' at a ceremony lasting seven hours straight, the course's regular activities began at 4:00 pm. A panel of founders and senior members of the Peoples' Health Movement (PHM) gave an overview of the main events in the history of the PHM: the meeting in Alma Ata, Russia in 1978, the First Assembly in Savar, Bangladesh in 2000, and the Second Assembly in Cuenca, Ecuador in 2005. The panel also reviewed the declarations from the two assemblies, and their personal experiences there.

The course's organizers provided logistical information and different committees were formed among the 65 participants—students, facilitators, the communications team, administrators, and special guests.


IPHU
Universidad Internacional
por la Salud de los Pueblos
NOLES
POR EL DERECHO A LA
SALUD DE LOS PUEBLOS



INTERCULTURALISM IN HEALTH

A positive and valuable aspect of the International Peoples' Health University (IPHU) Guatemala was the latitude the organizers and facilitators gave to all the participants to perceive, feel, discuss, and express the whole intercultural issue. Furthermore, this showed that interculturalism, when used well, nourishes and fertilizes the communication and understanding that people from different backgrounds need, not only for proposing a unified road toward the development of a healthy life, but also so that each individual's position can serve as a marker along the route, making its legacy and its course stronger.

However, interviews with a group of participants did bring out that there lacked a methodical explanation of two themes indispensible to the development of the intercultural environment; that is, culture as a historical construct, and the identity of peoples and individuals as the location in a territory and a vision of the world that we must transform. This would have made possible centring the work better on people's health, without the discussion having to depend on a not very diffuse conceptual framework.

In effect, in many interviews and at certain points in the IPHU, people said that they wanted to reject the term 'interculturalism', and replace it with a term such as 'cultural universalism'. On many occasions, people also used the verb 'unlearn,' as a way of rejecting all they had been taught from a Western perspective. Both reactions were reasonable and justifiable.

However, we should not try to cover up the problem with just a Band-Aid. Because we would also have to reject the terms 'universalism' and 'culture', both words that express Western concepts, and the discussion would have become an endless spiral into the negation of the negation, wasting precious time needed for the work of the IPHU.

Additionally, the action of 'unlearning' comes from a strategy imposed by developmentalism, which designed SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and LogFrame workshops where this 'cliché' serves more to confuse than to orient discussion and action. On the contrary, all that has been learned over a lifetime or generations of oppression is useful in engendering a new society, since the prospects for a new society are enriched the more one learns. Don Enoch, a Tzutujil Maya spiritual guide from Lake Atitlán, perfectly illustrated this point when he spoke up during the definition of 'living well', which for him means the following:

I think we must start from the way things are, counting on the things that we have at hand, and beginning to move forward step by step toward achieving what it is that we really want. (...) I think that the situation of the armed conflict and since the Conquest, shows that we have great strength ...it is not trauma any more. We got over that years ago; we have already learned where that has come from, that it has not come from inside us....



Because of this, the Maya welcoming ceremony and opening of the IPHU, organized around and fed by the Sacred Fire, was fundamental in 'nettling' all those present and in spurring budding friendships in people who had not previously known each other. For this reason, it is important to honour Tata Pedro and Nana Fabiana, Carlos, Rosenda, and Donato, who were generous enough to take all of us into their world and, in addition, to make sure that the individual fires would converge in a harmonic whole destined to nourish the entire event. It was also indispensable to seal the academic event with the energy inherited from the first inhabitants of Mesoamerica, in a ritual charged with depth and authenticity: because the ritual has the function of neutralizing and harmonizing homogeneity, and it is through this fusion that the participants decided to belong to this group identified within a territory that, from 14 to 24 April 2010, was identified as 'IPHU-Guatemala.'

Thus, we want to use these short pages to systematize the responses of the participants who were interviewed during and after the event. But first we must provide a historical context for the concept of 'interculturalism', to provide a greater understanding of the challenge of appropriating the concept and applying it to peoples' health.

Interculturalism: a bit of history

A reflection about 'the other', individually or as a group starts with the invasion of Mesoamerica and South America in the 15th century, a period in which this vast land was lashed by the presence of Spaniards and Portuguese. They came into these lands without understanding them, without wanting to understand them, unleashing a 'black legend' about Amerindian practices as an excuse for their evangelization and for enslaving them.

In the 18th century, fed by the commercial and exploratory voyages that swelled in number with the development of gold and silver mining, the slave trade and mercantilism, the reflection about 'what is different from oneself', was situated on a philosophical plane, and took shape in the European 'Enlightenment'. Based on the concept of the 'noble savage' and of the description of his way of life, utopian models of communal 'good living' developed in different locations in the Europe of preindustrial progress. Conceived of as projects for the emancipation of humanity, or of one group in particular—Europeans—these ventures ensured the autonomy of their inhabitants based on the development of harmony with nature, though none of these attempts bore fruit.

After the downfall of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires in the early 19th century, the European economy advanced to a new stage in its development, and since then, the planet has been steadily used up by the ravages of capitalism. This means that imperialism is continuing the job of colonialism in the exploitation of mines and other resources and in other enterprises using forced labour, justified as part of 'human progress'. It also continues with new forms of exploitation under the command of transnational corporations, which are the ones that define global geopolitics, deciding where wars will be fought and who should die to make room for others.

With this disturbing history, it can be said that between the Americas and Europe interculturalism developed in a violent scenario of individual interests and antagonism and in a context of oppression and inequality. This led the natives to form millenarian movements that attempted, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, to restore their fallen ancient empires.



Can we, then, speak of 'interculturalism' in those times? The answer is that, despite the violence, we cannot negate the genetic mixing known as 'mestizaje'. In effect, alongside the Amerindian or native peoples, we have the New World mestizos, who, because they were born in Latin America, should have their 'right of the soil' and 'right of blood' recognized, whatever their origins may be—Afro-descendents or mestizos of any possible ancestry.

Furthermore, pictographic and written pre-Colombian Mesoamerican documents can be considered as vectors of interculturalism between both worlds. This is because directly or indirectly they took a different conception of the world and of history across the ocean. In fact, many of the accounts left by the chroniclers and other civil and religious colonial officials base their information on primary sources. For example, one of the things that the Franciscan Fray Bernardino de Sahagún compiled in his work, General History of the Things of New Spain, was medical specialties and types of practitioners that existed in 16th century Mexico.

On the other hand, there is no written pre-colonial information for the Andean region. However, there are some truly intercultural documents, since mestizo authors wrote them. One good case is the work of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, The First New Chronicle and Good Government, in which completely Europeanized illustrations associate the Andean and Christian concepts of time in telling the history of Peru before and after the Conquest.

Most of the later ethnographic and anthropological studies done on Amerindian peoples were either motivated by a healthy interest in learning about other ways of life and of seeing the world or, in contrast, thought of as instruments of colonial administration.



They were also used for gaining a better understanding of the foundations of the institutions of the 'other', in order to thereby better weaken and control their people. However, in order to get to this,

they had to enter into contact with these peoples, learn their languages, participate in their rituals and celebrations, and become sufficiently intimate with them to be able to penetrate their world. On the flip side, others also had to penetrate the Western mindset and understand a way of thinking that had nothing in common with their own.

Historically, this was always a one-way relationship, given that the interest in penetration came from the Western side and almost never from the other side. This feature is what gave the intercultural issue in Latin America a face of imposition and inequality, because the interests in play were located on one side of the relationship.

Influenced by the revolutionary exploits in Cuba, Peru, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Colombia, local and regional indigenous and peasant organizations in Latin America arose in response to national government ineffectiveness in dealing with the problems of poverty and inequity, and because of the expropriation of their lands and resources. In response, once the uprisings of May 1968 in Europe and the Viet Nam war for the United States were behind them, international agencies began to take interest in issues such as inter-ethnic problems, the indigenous situation, and national liberation movements. These are the issues that were highlighted by the Barbados I and II meetings (1971 and 1977), both coordinated by the distinguished Mexican anthropologist, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, a pioneer in championing the reconstruction of indigenous territories in Latin America, beyond their current boundaries. At the same time, history and anthropology in Europe moved to show indigenous views from an indigenous perspective and no longer from a Western one, and to denounce ethnocide in the Americas.

At the end of the 1970s, wars of national liberation also broke out in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and Sendero Luminoso appeared somewhat later in Peru. However, these movements did not consider indigenous groups from the perspective of their ethnicity.

Starting in the 1980s, 'development anthropology' developed, first in Christian democratic West Germany, and spreading since then, as a way of counteracting the growing revolutionary manifestations in Latin America. The idea ended up 'infecting' all the large Western powers and then, out of a desire to control a situation that was slipping out of the hands of national governments, there was a scattering of domestic development projects based on a 'gender' perspective and, later on, in the 1990s, on 'interculturalism'. Meanwhile, the idea was strengthened by the fall of Soviet communism in 1989 and the subsequent joke of 'transparency' and the supposed 'end of history' and of Modernity declared by the post-modernists.

Thus, 'development anthropology' began preparing aspirants in the mid-1980s, who little by little began heading up foundations that have deep roots in international agencies, local European governments, and

the US federal government, from which they would receive (and continue to receive) juicy subsidies for 'managing' development, in their respective countries, or rather poverty in many of them. At present, these leaders control the policies of '20th century socialism', at least in Ecuador.

Thus, the goals of the Christian Democrats were fulfilled: the road to a radical change in the semi-feudal and semi-colonial structures in the republics of Latin America was blocked. Communities fought over mining and over the control of water, which were, in fact, the principal economic targets of the 'development anthropology' geniuses.

There was also discontentment with the issue of 'gender', which was introduced from the West by force, but with money. By delving into intimate aspects of human groups without a prior focus from both



perspectives—the masculine and the feminine—gender projects contributed more to dividing and to deepening inequality between women and men than to solving the problem. That is, they would provide short-term solutions, without dealing with the structural underpinnings of Latin American society, still subjected to unequal socio-political and productive relationships.

As a result, the issue of interculturalism was also introduced from the West to Latin American government spheres, which produced national bilingual education units in indigenous regions. In Ecuador, for example, this response by the national government was due to the ethnic upheaval that sparked the indigenous uprising of 1990. This was when we began to hear about the need to introduce an intercultural focus into indigenous education, which primarily consisted of adding Quichua to the school curriculum. This was a way to transmit Western concepts and methods to indigenous children and youth, mixed with native philosophy and their ways of life, but very superficially.

The appalling manipulation of the concepts of the native and Western worlds deepened the process of deculturation/acculturation of the indigenous sector, which was then primed to serve as the guinea pig for 'local development' NGOs and when they got tired of the failures of the embroidery workshops, of the harebrained farming experiments that did not help in the least, of the macro-projects and the 'seed' projects, they finally opted for a radical solution—that is, migration to the United States and to Europe.

Nevertheless, the flip side of this process is assimilation. In Ecuador, interculturalism had a positive effect at a time when native peoples were adopting it as an additional tool for winning their demands and used it to strengthen their spheres of life.



An indigenous and Afro-descendent intellectualism that had developed in the universities of the 1970s and was promoted by young people in the 1990s, took up the concept and began to burnish it, so that the 'tortilla flipped over' (the tables were turned) for the developmentalist project. The conception that saw indigenous people as the only 'legitimate' inhabitants of Abya Yala and that relegated mestizos and Afro-descendents to the sidelines of history disappeared; resistance was homogenized through an Amerindian, diverse interculturalism; each group with its idiosyncrasies: native, Afro-descendent, Montubio, mestizo, etc. All of this took place, at least from the theoretical and even organizational perspectives of a society that is creating itself from the inside.

With regard to the gender perspective, we also cannot discard the positive results that, for example, were obtained by certain interventions in areas where there was high migration, where there were no longer any men. It served above all for moral and legal support for women who, alone and with their sexuality repressed, had to head the household and face the dual burden of being mothers, while working the land and rounding out their income by making handicrafts. It was also useful for them in winning 'masculine' opportunities in political spheres.

Finally, in each Latin American country the context in which the intercultural perspective was created was different: some, like Bolivia and Ecuador, have been assimilating it for years and included interculturalism in their nations' constitutions. The Bolivia of Evo Morales is fighting for it and applying it beyond political discourse. In certain Mesoamerican countries, the people themselves are practicing their intercultural vision from the perspective of the struggle and in the midst of imperialist oppression. Others, such as Colombia and Chile, are debating, and, particularly in Colombia, their constitutions include important legal advances, which however, are only on paper. Argentina and Uruguay have not even considered the issue. Venezuela opted for a Bolivarian republic and constitution; that is, based on a concept beyond the ethnic, and based on being 'Latin American', etc., etc. This does not mean that in our countries native, Afro-descendent, and mestizo peoples are not seeking to achieve interculturalism, but rather that the proposal comes from beyond the national government.

Responses to interculturalism: IPHU- Guatemala

The interviews done by the ComunicándoNOS Team of the Peoples' Health Movement – Latin America (PHM-LA) with IPHU-Guatemala participants led us to reflect on two questions. The first centred on what was understood by 'interculturalism' and how that tied in with the issue of health. The second was how to visualize the results of what the IPHU is building, with regard to primary and comprehensive health care, in the participants' projects in their home countries.

In addition, in all the interviews the central problem was 'identity'. Whether this was well integrated or only partially conceived, it was a principal factor in the comprehension of interculturalism—to be able to look at oneself as a historic being and the holder of a future, in order to be able to look at others in identical conditions, and see that all have the same future.

The participants also have different levels of awareness about interculturalism, which correspond to their own awareness of individual or collective identity: the Argentine, Peruvian, and Paraguayan participants do not say they are 'mestizos'; they choose a national macro-conscience and raise awareness of the intercultural issue when facing other ways of life, both in and outside their country. One of the participants, a Colombian-Venezuelan Inga, sees this in an interesting way, by starting from his local ethnicity and homogenising it into a Latin American 'supra-ethnicity'. Raquel, from Paraguay, still sees it as utopian:

"I understand interculturalism as a social and political approach that grows out of a social struggle. It is the coexistence among various cultures, not just the mere existence of several cultures in a single land. I also understand that this is a utopian ideal, that we are moving toward it, and that we are not there yet."





Several countries and ethnic groups, as well as Afro-descendents, are clearly set in their ethnic identity, and deal with interculturalism from this position: they tolerate it because it is the only path that national States, imitators of the West, allow them to use to make themselves heard and to act; or instead, they reject it as an imposition that relegates them to folklore, or throws them crumbs as part of the right to cultural expression. In this latter case, there are two coexisting realities that do not mesh:

"The concept of 'interculturalism' was imposed on us. The Chilean government wanted to convince us that interculturalism, for Chileans toward the Mapuche people, was to set up hospitals with beds oriented toward the sun, by hanging signs in the Mapuche language, and by bringing in our healers—the 'machis'. We disagree with this. We don't even talk about 'interculturalism'; we talk about 'Mapuche health' and 'Western health'." (Dany)

Both the native and the Afro-descendent peoples define themselves as such within their national sense of belonging, but the intercultural effort continues to move in just one direction: from the ethnic to the Western, in which the former must always

give way to the latter.

Therefore, interculturalism is more of a practice than something to theorize about, according to the West: in effect, Western rationalism forces its non-Western interlocutor to undertake actions that must correspond to the interests of its development model and to the way in which it has, for centuries, conceived the planet. Groups of people who have not partaken of capitalism should feed those who have; thus, the former must produce according to the demands of the latter.

Along these lines, we should not expect too much from 'equal and fair trade', which the latter offer to the former, because although this alternative grew out of the good will of certain not-for-profit agencies, it does not solve the basic problems of indigenous and campesino communities: orders are few, the networks lack the instruments for facilitating this trade at the pace of the conventional market, and handmade production makes it difficult to supply many markets in a short period of time. The Western concept of 'fashion' forces manufacturers to change their aesthetic patterns, which, in the long run, is counterproductive for them, since they begin to lose the cultural markers of their identity. Finally, the West is globalizing handicrafts: poorly made Asian knock-offs of Amazonian products have been seen in European shops.

Interculturalism, as it is understood in Western 'development' circles, makes the decisions that the rest must obey. Might not the challenge posed about the dispensability of native peoples in the world be the answer? If they are not important to the Western world, why should they want to become indispensable, by trying to become competitive? Would it not be better to work on developing true autonomy, based on the true territories? The question is, will The West permit this?



All this explains why The West was never interested in interculturalism between native ethnic groups or between Afro-descendent ethnic groups. This did come up in several of the interviews, however, at the level of mutual sharing of health practices, at least. And if these practices exist in the health area, it means there are also common-law agreements on the management of natural resources, on ethnic frontiers, and on alliances at all levels. That is, a legal body of customs and social behaviours exists that enables these agreements.

This reflection takes the debate to another level. On the job, to a greater or lesser extent, the participants are regularly practicing interculturalism in primary care and holistic health. Therefore, it becomes indispensable to discuss the relationship between interculturalism and health at a deeper level. Because when considering holistic health based on the conservation of natural settings and the preservation of indigenous and Afro-descendent traditional medicine, the concept of interculturalism constitutes the foundation for promoting common action, on the condition of not subordinating the non-Western rationale to the Western one. With 'intercultural health', we understand the interest in moving away from the 'unfeeling' practice that characterizes Western medicine; that is, a resolve to not become close to the patient to prevent any subjectivity or personal involvement.

A good example comes from Mapuche Chile, where they have a response: *(...) Developing a referral—counter-referral system... because as indigenous doctors [trained in Western medicine] we have the capacity to distinguish whether the patient has a Western illness or a Mapuche illness. (...) Based on the patient's symptoms... we do tests. If these reveal a Mapuche illness, we send the patient to the machi and she confirms the diagnosis and provides treatment. (...)The machi works the same way: she makes a diagnosis, distinguishing between Mapuche and Western illnesses. (...) If it is Western, she sends the patient to us. (Dany)*

Sexual diversity: interculturalism and different 'gender' trends in culture

The sexual diversity component is not completely integrated into the concept of comprehensive health. This territory is culturally very complex and is generally seen as socially taboo. However, in general, there is now more openness in society, and little by little it is sharing open venues and dialogue with the heterosexual components. Along these lines, the IPHU is one of the latest resources, but it is not sufficient. Let us take a look.

To begin with, the institutions most opposed to sexual diversity are the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations. The latter are very important in the lives of native peoples, especially in Guatemala. The Maya do not talk about the issue: perhaps they deal with this issue in their own way, but not openly. In general, native peoples do not have a public position on this topic; it is almost as if sexual diversity did not exist in these communities. On the other hand, according to the Andean worldview, every individual has both genders in them; the masculine side is stronger in men and the feminine side is dominant in women.

This means that in Mesoamerica this concept needs to be dealt with in ordinary, everyday life, because, according to Yonatan, a gay Venezuelan man, his movement includes indigenous homosexuals who have been banished from their homelands.

Second, sexual diversity is part of the issue of 'gender' and forces heterosexual interlocutors to deepen their understanding



of what can be called the 'sexual diversity culture', expressed by a common trunk: an individual's freedom to choose a sexual orientation. From this, there are multiple branches: gays, lesbians, trans (who change sex), inter (or hermaphrodites), and bisexuals.

Thus, in the heart of each branch we find the gender issue. For a homosexual, gender does not change: there are gay men and gay women, even if they change roles in their relationships. With transgender people, the perspective changes: their physical gender does not correspond to their psychology gender, and they resolve this antagonism changing their appearance and sex; that is, by electing the gender they feel they belong to. According to Yonatan, transgender people suffer the most discrimination and violence. Intersex people have an even more complex situation, because they are constantly subject to gender confusion. Bisexuals might not question their gender, and can more easily pass unnoticed in heterosexual society.

That is, up until this point, the problem lies in the realm of personal identity and social acceptance. But we still need to examine what



sexually diverse individuals face when they seek health care. This is because they are kept apart from society and have trouble finding good health care, unless they have money; i.e., their health depends on their socioeconomic status. If they come from the lower classes, they often turn to prostitution to pay for costly gender reassignment surgery, which actually means risking their health. And if they can't pay for the operation, they turn to extreme methods that could maim or kill them. What this means in the end is that national governments are not providing social security coverage for these kinds of cases. Along these lines, it is absolutely necessary to create a separate place within comprehensive health care for sexually diverse people. This is even more necessary because this population is at constant risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS—not because of their personal sexual practices, but because some of them have to turn to prostitution.

A third point of discussion looks precisely at the topic of interculturalism. This led to a certain degree of confusion among the IPHU-Guatemala participants, especially when dealing with aspects of 'interculturalism', which involves the meeting of two or more cultures of different origins, and of 'socio-cultural groups', which involves differences within the same culture. Yonatan explained it this way:

"In the sexually diverse population one can definitely talk about interculturalism. (...) And in these situations there are different nuances. Gay men have their own way of interpreting certain aspects of society, as do lesbians, transsexuals, and intersex people. So, yes, there is interculturalism, because each one has a different worldview, which in turn interacts with that of the other, and it all becomes a dynamic. What a gay man does in Caracas, a gay man can do in Lima, or in Buenos Aires. Sexual diversity is as varied as the stars in the sky and sand in the seas: distinct, but we complement each other, learning from some, unlearning from others."

Additionally, within a sexually diverse society, there are groups of indigenous, Afro-descendent, and European origin. Among them, it is clear that they weave a fabric of intercultural relations. The same occurs among sexually diverse people from different countries, independent of whether they are Afro-descendent, mestizo, or indigenous. Even if we cannot speak of 'interculturalism' among the aforementioned different groups, we can say that each has its own codes of recognition, its own body language, and spoken and written language. Therefore, we can only speak of 'diverse gender trends' that developed cultural expressions parallel to the norms of the global culture.

Co-existing cultural differences

"(...) Because I have worked in occupational psychology, and because I have been in communities in the East, in the highlands, and in the valley...and now that I'm working in two organizations—one is Aymara Sin Fronteras, a partnership of communities—I have been able to see the variations and the convergence or similarities among different Aymara communities. That is, how they dealt with cultural differences in the face of an oppressive system, while maintaining silent resistance. And they have also appropriated, absorbed things from the colonial system. (...) In the prison where I also work, I see a big difference.... It is a place where people have to live under different conditions and develop a different kind of culture to cope with life behind bars. Therefore, to me it seems that to look at interculturalism is to include all indigenous peoples, because they have so much essence. But other groups should also be included, such as homosexuals, socially disadvantaged groups such as prisoners, and others."

This is what Carla from Bolivia said when talking about the cultural responses of prisoners to their situation, which is somewhat similar to Yonatan's situation: with people from different cultural origins, interculturalism weaves its own constructs in the corresponding territory. But, if it involves codes established among people from the same cultural origin, they are only new cultural patterns appropriate to the territory where they had to develop.

Conclusion

This discussion is just the first step toward the development of a new type of peoples' health, one that includes respect for ancestral lands and the cultural practices that were cultivated there. Therefore, it is not about erasing the political boundaries of existing nations, but rather about developing a policy whereby native peoples can return to walk the pathways of life they developed over millennia, without having to show passports, and that mestizo and Afro-descendent peoples are walking alongside them. To achieve this purpose, why not do the opposite of what Guillermo Bonfil once said: that is, treat The West as dispensable for indigenous, mestizo, and Afro-descendent peoples? Instead of developing compartmentalized, elitist health care systems, why not develop integrated health based on a Latin American peoples' interculturalism, with Indianness, Africanness, and mestizaje at the centre of social coexistence? As Mexican anthropologist Néstor García Canclini said, "popular [culture] develops through hybrid, complex processes,

using as signs of identification elements originating from diverse classes and nations" (1995:157). Returning to the idea of Guillermo Bonfil, this would mean visualizing a 'deep' Latin America, nourished by a millenarian, endogenous history, instead of an 'imaginary' Latin America, born from the exogenous, barely 500 years ago.







one
THE DAY

THE MYTH

1.....

2. And I shall write the sayings of our earliest fathers and ancestors, Gagavitz* the name of one, Zactecauh the name of the other; and these are the sayings they spake as we came from the other side of the sea, from the land of Tulan,** where we were brought forth and begotten by our mothers and our fathers, oh my children, as said of old the fathers, the ancestors, Gagavitz and Zactecauh by name, the two heroes who came from Tulan and begot us, the Xahila.

3.....

4. These are the sayings of Gagavitz and Zactecauh, and these are the very words which Gagavitz and Zactecauh spoke: "Four men came from Tulan; at the sunrise is one Tullan, and one is at Xibalbay, and one is at the sunset; and we came from this one at the sunset; and one is where is God. Therefore there are four Tulans, they say, oh our sons; from the sun-setting we came, from Tullan, from beyond the sea; and it was at Tullan that arriving we were brought forth, coming we were produced, by our mothers and our fathers, as they say.

5. And now is brought forth the Obsidian Stone by the precious Xibalbay, the glorious Xibalbay, and man is made by the Maker, the Creator; the Obsidian Stone was his sustainer, when man was made in misery, and when man was formed; he was fed with wood, he was fed with leaves; he wished only the earth; he could not speak, he could not walk; he had no blood, he had no flesh; so say our fathers, our ancestors, oh you my sons.

Nothing was found to feed him; at length something was found to feed him.*** Two brutes knew that there was food in the place called Paxil, where these brutes were, the Coyote and the Crow by name.

Even in the refuse of maize it was found, when the brute Coyote was killed as he was separating his maize, and was searching for bread to knead, (killed) by the brute Tiuh Tiuh by name; and the blood of the serpent and the tapir was brought from within the sea by means of Tiuh Tiuh, with which the maize was to be kneaded; the flesh of man was formed of it by the Maker, the Creator; and well did they, the Maker and the Creator, know him who was born, him who was begotten; they made man as he was made, they formed man as they made him, so they tell. There were thirteen men, fourteen women; they talked, they walked, they had blood, they had flesh.

They married, and one had two wives. Therefore the race copulated, this race of old, as they tell, oh our sons. They brought forth daughters, they brought forth sons, those first men. Thus men were made, and thus the Obsidian Stone was made, for the enclosure of Tullan; thus we came to where the Zotzils were at the gates of Tullan;

arriving we were born, coming we were produced, coming we gave the tribute, in the darkness, in the night, oh our sons." Thus spoke Gagavitz and Zactecauh, oh my sons, and what they said has not been forgotten.

They are our great ancestors; these are the words with which they encouraged us of old.



* Gagavitz: "mountain of fire, volcano"
** Tulan or Tula, a city in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico where it is thought that many Mesoamerican peoples originated from.
*** Maize
Taken from "The Annals of the Cakchiquels," Daniel Garrison Brinton, downloaded from Project Gutenberg.

POEM

Invocation to Xipe Totec (excerpt)

Don thy golden tunic
Oh, Nocturnal Drinker!

May thy waters of precious stones
come down to the Earth.
May the cypress of the offering
turn into the quetzal bird.
May the fire serpent
come down to us.
May the tender cornstalk
Be neither burned nor destroyed.
Green is my heart
like the precious jade.
Green is my heart
But it longs to see the gold
ripening on the ear.

Green is my heart
that rejoices tremulous
awaiting the birth
of the Caudillo of War.

Don thy golden tunic
Oh, Nocturnal Drinker!

May the maize bear fruit
and its golden grains be abundant.
I bow to thee,
oh, Drinker of the Night!
I kneel and I invoke thee
facing the mountain
that shelters your emerald.
I cry out thy name
until it reaches the stars
The Caudillo of War is born!

Taken from Invocación a Xipe Totec, version by Pedro Geoffroy Rivas, based on a Nahuatl poem.

Iximche, in the heart of Guatemala

In the heart of Guatemala's highlands lies an important archaeological complex with enormous significance to the Kaqchikel Maya people, and to the country as a whole. A visit to Iximche is a chance to learn about the history of ancient Mesoamerica and the first years of contact with the Spanish. This is a brief account.

The prehistoric Maya territories covered several modern Mexican states, particularly Chiapas and the Yucatán, as well as the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize.

The Maya are known from their monuments and in particular their own glyph-based writing





system, which primarily chronicle hundreds of years of historical events. Modern archaeologists have used this writing along with other information to map out Maya social formation and development, which has been divided into three time periods:

Preclassic, from 2000 BC to 250 AD, marked by the beginning and growth of urban centres.

Classic, from 250-1000 AD, the high point of the city-states.

Post Classic, from 1000 AD to the Spanish invasion, a time of political instability, and the abandonment of cities that had flourished for centuries.

Iximche arose in the late Post Classic years leading up to the arrival of the Iberians and continued in an important role for sometime after.

Iximche is located in a fertile area at 2,260 meters above sea level, just 34 km from the modern city of Chimaltenango. It has

important rivers that flow to the Pacific and other resources from large nearby volcanoes, which supply hewn stone for building and materials such as the ash used in Maya pottery making.

In the history of the highlands, the Post Classic period was characterized by the greatest flourishing of the Quiché, Kaqchikel, and Tzutujil nations, which ended with the European invasion. These were societies with internal conflicts. They protected their urban centres with large embattlements; and, in particular, they would locate them in elevated areas, surrounded by deep gorges, such as the case at hand.

By the middle of the 14th century, the Quiché had gained control over most of the central Guatemalan highlands; however, their expansion stagnated, and in 1475 the Kaqchikel rebellion began. That was the beginning of the conquest of Quiché territory.

According to one of the main treatises of the time, Memorial de Sololá (1579), the Spaniards arrived in Iximche on 14 April 1524, commanded by Pedro de Alvarado, whom they received peaceably, allowing him to found, on 25 July, the first capital of the province of Guatemala. However, on 5 September, the Kaqchikels rose up against their former allies, due to the excessive demands for gold and abuse by Alvarado and his people, and they fled the city, taking refuge in the mountains from where they began their resistance.

On 7 February 1526, the city of Iximche was burned by a group of Kaqchikels that refused to accompany Alvarado on the conquest of Honduras. This forced the Spanish capital of Guatemala to move to Almolonga in November 1527, where Santiago de Guatemala was founded. This led to the third founding with the same name, in the Panchoy Valley, now known as Antigua.



This chapter of history ended with the Spaniards' punitive actions, which included the murder of one of the Lords of Iximche, Cachi Imox, and the submission of the Kaqchikels, who, from 1528 on were forced to pay tribute to the colonial regime.



Iximche contains temples and stepped pyramids, courtyards, ball courts, open spaces for viewing the surroundings, altars with circular figures that are just like the Andean 'chakana', water fountains, and, of course, deep gorges. Cornfields probably surrounded the site and gave life to the landscape, as the main food of the gods.

So, how could anyone in his right mind think that in this harmonious union of society and nature there lived people capable of the most horrendous human sacrifices; of wars to achieve not only the death that it entails, but also supposed prisoners to steal their hearts with the sacred obsidian, when these altars only dignify life and the joy of existence?

Because in addition, making war, with all its violence—when it involves 'doors within a historic space', without justifying it—has explanations that will never accept the calculated intromission of foreign societies, which came to arbitrate spirituality, and lay hold of their resources and workforce.

For all this, Iximche is not an archaeological site in the strict sense of the word; unknowingly, or in secret, dozens of Kaqchikels—women, men, children and the elderly, the wise, and all who understand the heartbeat of the earth—walk and commune with the plan of its stones laid out in steps, the stucco and its designs, typical of a people that has communed with the heavens, as well as with the earth and the subterranean world; the trees with their invisible roots dominate the Iximche landscape.

¿Dialogue between civilization and barbarity?

The civilizations that have reached the highest levels of development down through history are not necessarily those that have achieved the greatest accumulation of material goods. Rather, they are those that have developed codes of social conduct solidly based in values with deep human content and lifestyles in harmony with nature. They are likewise all the human groups that have penetrated the sphere of universal knowledge, without relying on an almost religious dependence on the development of science and sophisticated technology.

The greatest effort of human beings and of societies in general, from the perspective of their physical, intellectual, or spiritual capacities, is not measured in an equal or greater deterioration of the environment and people, from whence resources are extracted for transforming adversity into opportunity, to the exclusive benefit of the few and misfortune of the many.

On the contrary, it demands a global vision and the recognition of the processes of society and of nature, framed in always immutable laws, in order to get a balanced yield between what is taken and what is left, seeking always that the latter be greater or better than the former. If it were otherwise, the dialectical order that structures the movement of life would fracture and, little by little, chaos would ensue, which would be unavoidable as it becomes uncontrollable and unpredictable, only allowing us to anticipate the end of the road.

Therefore, taking into account from this perspective the differences manifested among peoples, nations, states, and empires that have existed and continue up until now, is it possible to undertake a dialogue between civilization and barbarity?

This question requires the prior definition of both these terms and its analysis, from our point of view, also has to be focused on the ideas we expounded upon earlier. However, the Eurocentric doctrine and all the centrisms that have occurred over thousands of years of history, put domination as a principle of superiority over the dominated, who is seen

as inferior; or also, civilization as the title for the victors and barbarity as the dishonour of the vanquished.



In fact, a simple overview of the greatest states in the Americas in the 15th and 16th centuries—Maya, Aztec, or Inca—despite the black legend that the Spanish invaders imposed on them and that regrettably is still maintained in certain social strata in Latin America, makes it possible to understand the extreme differences that these states confronted regarding the conception of the world and the arrangement of social, economic, and cultural life following 1492. This fact—without overlooking the values and knowledge of the other; that is, of those who entered these continental lands uninvited—obliges us to have an interpretation that is more conceptual and that refers to the ensuing results, when the native peoples had governed their world and their destiny, in the face of the supposed development that, based on the Western model, began with the colonial and feudal imposition, through the transition to the republic and modern nation-states.

To this end, let us begin with the Maya example, which sums up what happened as a sort of constant and with obvious differences, among the peoples of Abya Yala.

First of all, let us begin with the process of neolithization that occurred in Mesoamerica, Central and South America at least 6,000 years ago. This was when the nomadic societies of hunters and gatherers organized into stable villages, and it was the beginning of sedentism, thanks to the management of domesticated plants including maize, potato, cassava, and hundreds of others. From that time on, an order based on the usufruct of the land, not specified by its ownership but by the distribution of parcels for crops by all the members of the communities, produced the growth of food surpluses and the trade in produce, understood as exchange among communities and a division of labour, which in the case of the Maya, around 1500 BC involves the coming of a period that archaeologists call the Preclassic.

This was followed by the Classic and Post Classic periods, which included the eventual dominance of the Quiché and the Kaqchikels, who would confront the Spanish. Different Maya groups, with over 20 languages, dominate the territory of Guatemala, and are also present in Chiapas and Yucatan, Mexico. In the past, they had a much more widespread territory, extending to El Salvador, Belize, and Honduras.

¿What did the Maya civilization look like?

First, it had a maternal bond to the land and to its produce, particularly maize, both of which were sacred; they could not be owned, but only used according to the distribution of plots or milpas that met the needs for food and family and social reproduction, regardless of their category or status.



It had a view of nature that was also imbued with sacredness, which required its proper use and not the abuse of its resources, with economic benefits concentrated in powerful classes and sectors.

Likewise, its spirituality and religiousness revolved around the land and nature, which, although it differentiated social strata with marked inequalities in the later periods, favoured above all the exchange between production and more or less balanced benefit, given that in these areas of coexistence, poverty was condemned, and even more so begging.

It had a legal system based on the division of labour, particularly between farmers and people who worked in the arts, handicrafts,

trade, manufacturing, and the exchange of raw materials over short, medium, and long distances. Additionally, the social pyramid narrowed at its apex, with rulers, dignitaries, and priests, plus people nearby at the service of the ceremonial centres, with clear-cut status.

Their function was to organize production and distribution in the economy, which had to flow from the bottom, up, and then back again to the base.

There were also cultural and scientific developments, with great achievements in the knowledge of the cycles of time, philosophy, health and medicine, different technology, art, writing, etc., all of which was tied to the prediction of the cycles in the agricultural calendar, without the precision of which, life would have seemed uncertain.

With all of this, the inequalities typical of the human spirit were not unknown, which provoked wars and rebellions with the inevitable breakdown in the dialectic order that structures the movement of life and that when it fractures, little by little chaos ensues. Although this is soon overcome in a new



cycle of equilibrium, just as night is followed by day and life is reborn out of death.

Because in the end, what is important is sustained in what is permanent and in the capacity to reproduce life, something that these peoples understood, and thus they designed their patterns of behaviour and civilization. It is the land and the resources obtained from it, and which are conserved, that are the essential matrix for human existence and all species. This should not disappear, even though the cycles of life and death in people and even in societies are subject to this ebb and flow.

On the opposite side are the others, those who arrived laden with technologies especially designed for war and oppression; those who landed on beaches and mountains propped up by a religion of dogmas, fear, and suffering. These people, decked out in suits of armour and game for gold and getting rich quickly, managed in a few short years to dismantle the logic of millennia that had established an understanding between the temple and the milpa, the sacred poetry and texts, which gave meaning to the existence of millions of individuals whose bodies wasted away.

In effect, the brutishness that came from a morbid religion and an economic system of servitude did not help the Castilians at all to understand the true wealth of these lands, which from beginning to end were sustained and continue still in the soil, in agriculture, and in their relationship to nature. Thus began its expropriation and the enslavement of the indigenous peoples, entered in the books not as human beings but rather simply as labour.

It was as if the struggles fought over centuries by the peasants and poor of Europe were for naught, since soon the exploited from the other side of the world turned into exploiters. Therefore, with the cruelty that marked the ideology of the conquistadors, they set out to build an ideological system that justified barbarity in the guise of civilization. Private property was instituted as the divine principle of all legal systems, and its influence is at the base of Western, Christian behaviour. The god of misery and resignation likewise threw itself into the subjugation of minds and spirits that had been free, but now owed tribute, obedience, and sacrifice to the glory of the Roman church and the Spanish empire.

Thus arose large-scale mining, the latifundium, monocropping, and of course, forced service by indigenous peoples, while hunger and foreign diseases decimated local communities.

In the continuity of history, the nascent republics and modern states followed the path that was laid out. They simply changed the trappings, adopting and adapting new strategies and discourses, until neoliberalism, the bastard great-grandchild of the colonial empires, taking advantage of the amnesia we tend to suffer about our own history, began the final countdown to the destruction of the planet, caring little whether with the death of the peoples in charge of maintaining the flame of life, their grandchildren and descendents will go down with them.

This means that from this other perspective, by which I mean, from modern barbarity that began at the end of the 15th century, the essential matrix of human existence is not in that which is permanent and in the capacity to reproduce life, but rather in the egotistical and sick pleasure of accumulating fortune and power, regardless of who or what has to be sacrificed.

So, is there a possibility for dialogue and understanding between civilization and barbarity? The way things are going, no! Because we first must ask ourselves if the empires and supposed owners of the world are willing to renounce their privileges, since from the other side, that of the people, what more can be surrendered, since they barely have anything left?

It remains to be seen if there will some celestial sign, such as those that for now not even the Maya themselves believe in. This is the case of the ancient prophesies according to which, based on the poor reckoning caused by Western fatalism, the end of the world will be supposedly inevitable in the year 2012.

Or thinking, as a last recourse as always, that there is nothing left to do but to turn to the organized struggle by those who love life and want a dignified existence, such as the Maya people have done, supported by their knowledge and practices that propose the birth of a new time, if we manage to not end in a universal tragedy; that is, the rebirth of their civilization and of all civilizations that native peoples and those who include themselves in the basic existential values of humanity are not willing to yield.

In the secret laboratories and hangars of the modern empires, the powerful think about the science and technology that could save them when the apocalypse begins, transporting them to faraway worlds, where they can begin anew to exploit the resources found there. Will they be capable of taking with them the millions of slaves and servants they need for the success of this enterprise, or, on the contrary, are some already planning behind the backs of the others who will dominate whom?



Ethnic and national territories and globalization

It is true that planet Earth became delimited as a natural outcome of its own formation. The continents had their boundaries in the oceanic waters; the landscape was one vast expanse barely broken by emerging mountain ranges, chains of smoking volcanoes, and endless tempests. Many millions of years have passed since then.

This means that the territories and the composition of ethnic frontiers, which emerged only a few thousand years ago, take up no more than a few seconds in geological time, which is read in strata and deep gorges, eroded by the passing of the wind and the water.

Later, empires arose. The incipient national borders began to fade, absorbed by the longing for riches that maintained lavish kingdoms and imperial courts, followed ultimately by modern imperialism, with its multinational trusts, corporations, etc.

For centuries now, limits have been imposed through fratricidal wars pitting fraternal peoples against each other to produce systems that enable domination and exploitation of natural resources and people. Once the new frontiers are drawn according to 'the rules', that is, cutting up ethnic territories and rational ecological units, these limits will only serve as a pretext for the defence of the empires' own interests, which violate them every time circumstances require, uncaring about life as a whole or all it represents.

Demented and perverse are words that describe those who feed off people's pain; in particular, that of those who have the least, but who are the owners of that which is the most valued: the land that feeds them and enables their social reproduction. However, these epithets hide behind concepts such as democracy, liberty, and others like them that no one understands, but that are used cynically to trample others' rights, enclosed within the apparently inviolable borders of states that accept dependence.

Likewise, religions and legislation were invented to enable local oligarchies to wash their hands when necessary, or to use their litanies to drug those who have lost their bearings of identity and future. In any case, it all works marvellously: the masters walk around their backyard giving orders, with the subsoil, water, fields, and naturally, the people who make and build their dreams on them, at their disposal.

Inside the manor house, the major-domos protect the interests of the empire with forces of repression, willing to attack and destroy any attempt at revolt with utmost cruelty.

Conclusion: frontiers that divide peoples serve only for domination. Likewise, if the world

of exploitation and death is organized from the outside, then the world of social clarity should likewise be organized from within. Its historical and cultural base teaches us the connection among territories with a natural logic that makes rational, complementary use of their resources.

This is, at the base of the coming years — hard ones, or perhaps even harder than those we have endured so far —the key element for survival of the struggle for the reconstruction of ethnic and cultural territories, without borders measured in centimetres, but with areas of integration that enable the permeability of a world that should be just one, but not globalized for the benefit of the few.



The greatest clue to achieving this objective is in the history of the people, seen and read by themselves. In addition, comprehension of a world in constant flux, but seen from the changes that have occurred in the past several centuries, should integrate the mixing of peoples as a piece that is also crucial in the society we seek to build; because, in the end, the Earth with its strength offers us opportunity without absorbing us. It presents us with the rules of the game but it does not subordinate us as if we were automatons. It woos us with its magic, before leaving us without answers.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Living well

Gabriel, member of the community health and education support team, Chiapas, Mexico:

"Our perspective on our work has always been that, together with the people, with the communities, with the village health workers, we can all dream, think, and take action to help make life better. We do not think of health as just medical care, but also as the outcome of people living well, in accordance with their own cultural concepts, in accordance with their own expectations. So, along these lines, living well, which in Tzotzil and Tzeltal would be 'lekil kuxlejal', the good life, is fundamental to our work accompanying these peoples....

"The good life is not measured by how much you own, but rather how happy and pleased you are with the life you have in the community where you are, in the land where you live and with the people around you in your surroundings....

"In the communities of Tenejapa, everyone has, and everyone keeps, their customs. The 'principals' of the community are four people, four couples, like the four corners of the world. They are the caretakers of the community. They are not the authorities in the way that we understand as Westerners. They are the most respected people, who can guide the community. In their ceremonies, although they show elements of Catholicism, the elements of the Maya worldview are present."

Pablo, an Afro-descendant from Uruguay and Director of AMISEU- the Association of Sexual Minorities of Uruguay:

"All this baggage of knowledge that we have lets us educate ourselves and access all the services we need for education, food, medical care, housing, water, and land; and that enables us to have good health."

David, a Nicaraguan who calls himself 'multiethnic', from Miskito, mestizo, and Creole stock, is a village health worker in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region:

"There is always a relationship with nature, because nature not only gives us life, it is more than life, it is part of our being. And that is the relationship we have and the concept we have. And we see nature as a sister."

Viviana, a Bolivian physician of Aymara origin:

Sumaj kawsay is the balance in life that we seek as dignified, free, and caring people

and as indigenous communities. In different languages, we encourage living well among ourselves as brothers and sisters, with plants, animals, hills, stars, rivers—with everything around us. Living well means seeking a good life through respectful, loving relationships and interactions among people and with the whole universe. To do this, we need to create within ourselves and our surroundings allin munay, allin ruway, and allin yachay....

"Thus, sumaj and allin are complementary. We want to live properly and beautifully, with great respect for life.

"Allin munay means to love well. Munay means to love or to care deeply; it is feeling the cosmos and Pachamama lovingly. Allin yachay means to know things well, to understand well, to think well—to know well who we are, where we are, where we come from. From there, we can clearly propose where we want to go, and how we can do so, with our hearts and our minds.

"The ways of our ancestors is allin ruway, or doing things well, with intentionality, for everyone who interacts with us. When we do things fully and truly, we call forth the complementary forces of life, which, even though they are opposing, complement each other, creating the movement necessary for life, producing the true existence of this universe. This allin ruway is the synthesis in action of allin munay and allin yachay. This means that if we have good feelings and good knowledge, we will know how to do good things, for sharing and being part of this web of life."

William, a Nicaraguan:

«It is the highest aspiration for physical, personal, familial, and community conditions and for an individual's good relationship with nature. It is the result of a social construct and has a close relationship with the economic model. A capitalist model will promote an expectation in social groups for living well based on the consumption of material goods. In a social care economic model, a lifestyle is developed based on basic and purely necessary goods being conducive to living well. The way native peoples think of living well is related to their worldview and their respect for and close relationship to nature and its resources."





two
THE NIGHT

THE MYTH

Second prophetic wheel of a fold of katuns

11 Ahau

Katun 11 Ahau was the beginning of the katun-count, the first katun. The katun was established at Ichcaanzihoo, Face-of-the-birth-of-heaven, when the foreigners arrived. Red were the beards of the children of the sun, the bearded ones from the east, when they arrived here in our land.

Oh Itzá! Oh! Let us grieve, because they arrived! The strangers to the land are white men, red men, . . . a beginning of Plumeria, of carnal sin, . . . make ready. Oh Itzá, Water-sorcerer! There cometh a white circle in the sky, the fair-skinned boy from heaven, the white wooden standard that shall descend from heaven. A quarter of a league, a league away, it approaches. You shall see the dawn of a new day, you shall see the mut-bird. Oh! How there shall be intercession for us when they come.

Oh Itzá! Oh! Let us grieve, because they arrived! There shall come multitudes who gather stone and wood,[1] the worthless rabble, the zac ibteelob, of the town. Fire shall flame up at the tips of their hands. There shall be sufficient poison and also ropes to hang their lords.

Oh Itzá! Oh! Let us grieve, because they arrived! Oh Itzá, Water-sorcerer! Your worship is of no avail with the true God who has descended.

It is false in word and teaching. Niggard is the katun; scanty are its rains. Who would be the priest, who would be the prophet who would understand it when he came to Tancah Mayapan <or> to Chichen Itzá, Mouth-of-the-well-of-the-water-sorcerer? Alas! The <burden> laid upon the younger brothers; it came in Katun 7 Ahau through necessity, through misery, from the tribute, from the time it was first imposed upon you down to the tribute which you shall bear tomorrow and day after tomorrow in your children's time. Prepare yourselves to endure the burden of misery which is to come among your villages. This katun which has been established is, a katun of misery, a katun of the importunity of the devil, when it is established in Katun 11 Ahau. Receive your guests, the bearded men, the bearers of the sign of God. Your elder brothers, the men of Tantun,[2] come. They shall ask of you an offering to God with them.

Their priest was named Ah Miznilacpe. Their faces were <like> the puma, <like> Antichrist, on that day which is to come, on that day which confronts you, alas, in much misery, <my> sons. This is the word of our Lord: «It shall burn on earth, there shall be a white circle

in the sky, in that katun in time to come." It is the true word from the mouth of God the Father [sic].

Alas, very heavy is the burden of the katun that shall be established in Christianity. When it comes there shall be slavish talk, slavish ... servile men. When it comes, there shall be . . . you shall see. There shall come the head-chiefs, the halach-uinics ... the two day occupants of the thrones and mats ... in the <five> unlucky days at the end of the year, in the days of penance. This only is the end of the word of God. Eleven is the cup <of the katun>. The news <regarding> the aspect of its reign is gathered, all its teachings, all its words. You shall die; you shall live; but you may not understand the word of the living book. Ah, from Mayapan, Deer-standard, was his only son, his justice. He was put in prison, he was taken out, then he was bound and whipped. After that, when he was seated, the son was admonished. There was a hat on his head and sandals on his feet. A cord was tied about his waist when he came.



[1] Probably a reference to the construction of Spanish cities and churches with native labour.
[2] Tantun: Before-the-precious-stone.
Adapted from Roys R, The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, Washington, D.C., 1933.

UN POEMA

Bulletin and Elegy of Indian Enslavement (excerpt)

.....

I am Juan Atampam, Blas Llaguarcos, Bernabé Ladna,
Andrés Chabla, Isidro Guamancela, Pablo Pumacuri,
Marcos Lema, Gaspar Tomayco, Sebastián Caxicondor.
I was born and suffered in Chorlavi, Chamanl, Tanlagua,
Niebli. Yes, I suffered unto death in Chisingue,
Naxiche, Guambayna, Poalo, Cotopilaló.
I sweated blood in Caxaji, in Quinchirina;
in Cicalpa, Licto, Conrogal.
I endured the Christ of my people in Tixán, in Saucay,
in Molleturo, in Cojibambo, in Tovavela y Zhoray.
That's how I added more whiteness and pain to the Cross
that my
executioners brought.
To myself as well. To José Vacancela as well.
To Lucas Chaca as well. To Roque Caxicondor as well.
In Plaza de Pomasqui in a circle of other natives . . . .

Melchor Pumaluisa, son of Guapulo:
they cut off his testicles in the middle of the hacienda's
patio with a
hog-butchering knife,
And, kicking him, they paraded him
in front of our tear-filled eyes.
He was spurting out great intermittent streams of blood.
He fell face down in the flower of his body.
Oh, Pachacámac, Lord of the Infinite,
You, who stain the Sun among the dead . . .

And your Lieutenant and Chief Justice,
José de Uribe: "I order you." And I,
with the other Indians, carried him wherever he ordered
from house to house, on his visits, in a hammock
While our women, with our daughters, slaves,
were sweeping, carding, weaving, weeding,
spinning, licking mud dishes—of our making.
And laying with Viracochas,
our flowers with two thighs,
to bring forth the mestizo and future executioner.

. . . after four weeks of fasting.
They received me: My daughter split in two by Alférez Quintanilla.
Wife, his cohabitant. Two sons dead by the whip.
Oh and I, by Life, oh Pachacámac. That's how I died.

And from such suffering, to seven skies,
by seventy suns, oh Pachacámac,
wife giving birth to my son, I wrenched his arms.
Still soft after so much disaster, she said:
"Break the baby's hands; I don't want
him to be Viracochas' slave." I broke.

César Dávila Andrade, translated by Molly Weigel, in The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry, Oxford University Press, USA, 2009.

ARTICLES

Repression and religion

When the first Spaniards arrived in the New World, it seemed like a dream to the good Christians who had ventured across the deep blue sea, seeking lands where the light of Christianity was not yet shining; their sacred mission was to save souls, at any price. However, stowed away behind these noble intentions were greed and a thirst for riches, such that it was not long before our good invaders let loose as one their battle cry:

Gold!

Thus began one of the greatest genocides in history, and to blunt the pain of the thousands of oppressed, exploited communities, the church instituted pain as the path to salvation; sacrifice and divestment of worldly goods as the way to inclusion on the list of aspirants



to the kingdom of heaven, where, naturally, the poor and needy have their place.

Here on Earth the powerful still had their earthly pleasures, but in addition – since they controlled the ecclesiastical bureaucracy and its holy apostles as well – they had front-row seats in the heavenly paradise.

Because repression and religion have been inseparable down through history, to the point that when the bloody fascist dictatorships took power in Latin America, especially in countries with a large indigenous population, the balm of pain was once again a part of the religions of the day—that is, in the numerous varieties of Christianity, this time with a little label tucked away that says 'Made in USA'.

It makes quite a visual impact in the streets of Chimaltenango and everywhere else in Guatemala to see churches, radio stations, schools, prayer groups, church recreation facilities, and more that are evangelical or Protestant, along with posters with bible texts in supermarkets and in humble workshops and stores. These are part of a strategy implemented specifically during the last years of the war and the signing of the peace agreements. It is as if prayer and worship could bring back the thousands of people who were killed, jailed, and tortured—the toll of countrywide repression. As if resignation, raised in supplication and forgiveness, would quiet the voices of mothers, children, brothers and sisters, and so many others, massacred in cowardice by the dictatorship and its US advisors who designed the systematic elimination of entire villages and communities.

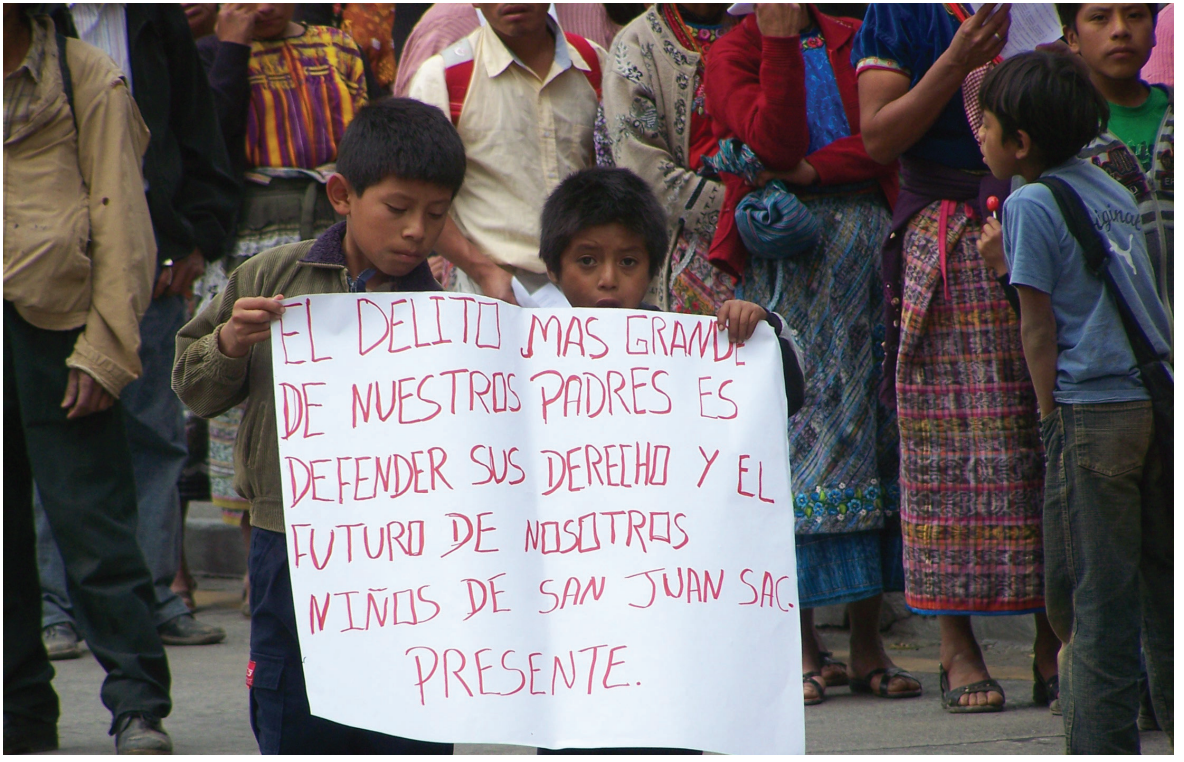
This explains how those who victimized thousands of people now have the support of some of their victims. The assassins were very skilful in this, when they condemned to silence the voices of those who were crying out for justice, reminding them once again that the kingdom of the poor is in heaven and that the sins of humanity are cleansed with blood. Thus, they now raise their hands, displaying them as instruments of salvation, since in the mindset of many of war's survivors, these hands represent divine justice.

In thinking about a new society, religions will have to be held accountable and concentrate on the problems here on Earth, without any of the tricks that tyrants and the powerful have taken advantage of. Otherwise, their road is condemned to lead to the darkest abyss of the night. All that is needed is for the consciences of those who fell into their webs to awaken.

Protestant churches: An orchestrated plan to dominate Latin America labelled "Made in USA"

Religions are magical inventions stemming from fear of the unknown of death, as if we could have everything and then suddenly, nothing! They also arose from the need to understand the apparent chaos of nature and the confusion in our knowledge, due precisely to our limits on understanding the laws governing the cosmos. Thus, religions are sincere responses, and always extol the loftiest of human values. However, little by little they become institutionalized and begin to manipulate these values and to subjugate the vast majority to the interests of the few who feel privileged or touched by divine grace.

For hundreds and thousands of years religions have functioned to rein in the individual and collective conscience. In the name of



a god of kindness and love, we sacrifice our most cherished longings for freedom and knowledge of how to live in harmony with others and with our surroundings.

Of course, we must distinguish between religion and spirituality. Religion is an institutionalized concept and the practice of a set of beliefs based on dogma and faith. Spirituality is the free expression of the feelings of respect and natural coexistence that we have with all that surrounds us and is alive.

Along these lines, those religions that always show a face of spiritual liberation now do so with different facades. Although some, like neo-Christian sects from the United States, brandish a face of open submission to the designs of the empire and to the ruling classes, in particular in so-called 'Third World' countries.

Let us review – through the open window of Guatemala – what is happening all over Latin America, since this Central American nation is the hardest hit by this scourge.

The Vatican is without a doubt the greatest example of the contradictions among the political and economic powers that influenced the history of Europe, beginning with the Christianization of European countries. That movement, which also affected the Middle East and a part of Africa, with the Crusades during the Mediaeval period, attempting to control the trade routes to Asia, then travelled to the 'New World' when it was supposedly 'discovered'. Starting in the 16th century, the Catholic Church expanded the territory under its dominion and that of the king and queen of Spain to dimensions heretofore unknown, forcing the local people, by the cross and the sword, to exploit precious metals and other resources, in exchange for which it imposed a single religion, as the means to spiritual salvation.

This domination, which lasted for centuries, only began to waiver when the feudal structures imposed in Latin America by colonization gave way to liberal changes, with a capitalist development model.



These changes did not always concur with the ideological aspects of traditional domination, based on the unbreakable alliance between the Church and landowners, which had continued governing the young republics that arose following their independence from Spain.

Thus, we had to wait until the latter half of the 20th century to understand the new ideology that was emerging, especially the imposition of the agro-export model that would require the modernization of the state. For this to happen, a new strategy needed to be devised, such as that proposed in the 1969 Rockefeller Report that suggested that the United States should focus its attention on the Protestant churches and military institutions of Latin America.

Thus, the proliferation of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal type Protestant churches occurred precisely when the region was the most immersed in conflicts, with the active participation of national armies, charged with repressing any attempt at social change. So, the cross came, but this time together with bayonets and napalm. First it was the Catholic Church from the Spanish empire, while now, its rivals, the Protestant churches, were coming from the U.S. empire.

What characterizes these branches of Christianity in modern times? First, Protestantism arose as a need by the liberalism of the late 19th century, which was seeking a religious base opposed to the old alliance between the Catholic leadership and the conservative political and economic powers. Thus, in Guatemala, these groups have been around for a little over a century and are one of the active underpinnings of the liberal movement.

Starting in the mid-20th century, the different historical variants of Protestantism made their official appearance—the Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist churches. As a product of this, in 1962, the corrupt regime of Ydígoras Fuentes began the first large national evangelization campaign in Guatemala. Later, the Pentecostal church (1930) emerged, which grew to have a strong influence on political leaders and the bourgeoisie of the capital city, for the most part. While preaching detachment from political affairs, it would instruct its adherents in the ideologies it saw fit.

In contrast, the neo-Pentecostals would be the ones that, starting in 1980, would join the current leaning toward active participation in political issues, although clearly from the perspective of the ruling classes and quite particularly from the position of the military, openly genocidal toward the Maya Indians and the people in general. The most prominent neo-Pentecostal, the dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, ran the Church of the Word, which followed the teachings of the group's founder, a rich U.S. businessman, who thought that the teachings should only be transmitted to those of his social class.

In these circumstances, the Catholic Church, displaced by domestic forces from its role as the 'spiritual guide' of Guatemalans, was also divided about the possibilities for



social change, offered by the government of Jacobo Árbenz (1951-1954), and in response to repression by the military, ruling classes, and imperialism. Thus, in disagreement with the ecclesiastical leadership, a large number of Catholics opted for an antiestablishment direction through the church of the poor, which arose out of liberation theology. Its followers were likewise repressed via murder, kidnapping, and forced disappearances, which was also the fate of other sectors opposed to capitalist domination.

In 1991, after the peace agreements were signed, a neo-Pentecostal and previously Pentecostal president—Jorge Serrano Elias—came to power in 'democratic' elections. This confirmed the relationship between the ideology of the ruling class, with its religious underpinnings, and the years of subjugation and religious imposition by evangelical churches through both their preaching

and supposedly charitable work, as well as by the force used to subject thousands of indigenous peasants, who were confined in concentration camps for prisoners of war, cynically called 'model villages' at the time. There, everyone knew that those who did not work—for the new landlords—did not eat and that they could not break their bread—their tortillas—until they had received the spiritual nourishment bestowed by the pastors.

In 1992—only a few years after the bloodiest repression and genocide that indigenous people in the Americas experienced in the 20th century—Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals in Guatemala had over 15,000 churches, 200 schools, a university, 12 nationwide radio stations, and a television station. These numbers have continued to grow and now some 35-40% of the people say they are practicing evangelicals.

Every religion has an underlying purpose, which is camouflaged. Like it or not, this is part of the power structures that have engendered the great inequality and the privileges of the few who want to hang on to them at any cost. It is part of the class struggle in which the powers that be are trying to impose their logic and what suits them.

Massacre and impunity

The thought of serial killers makes those with a strong conscience shudder. Taking stock of crimes of humanity—ethnocide, genocide, massacres discretely called errors of war—shame our condition as natural beings. The Inquisition will weigh down like lead on the supposed spirituality of the Vatican, which is drowning in its own exploits of power and glory. All monotheisms and exclusive practices have a string of crimes strangling their throats. There is not one little dictator, including the modern tyrants with democratic facades, that do not stain themselves with blood in the memory of their acts. San Francisco, the mystic of nature and of course Saint Dominique and so many other clerics, had in Torquemada and Torture, Inc. the best executors of martyrdom and the pyre for those who are non-believers of so much apocalyptic trash.

Times of spiritual usury and void of reason, which among other things, enabled the triumph of modern democracies, hidden in the garb of secret sects and praise to the capitalists and imperialists on duty, as the supreme asset of privileged groups, against the vast majority waste away. property

In some part of millennial Guatemala, only the silence of the dead and the cry of the survivors, their children, and memory can be heard. However, there is also a soft rustling from the spirits that did not surrender, as



a group, to the massacres and that little by little are rebounding like maize plants after a storm, to fulfil the cycles of the land.

People of such perseverance, who never give up the ghost!

What a division of horizons, when Guatemala only has the infinite windows of the Pacific and the Atlantic: harbours of all voyagers who attempt the secrets of time; that sort of Maya obsession, now in the blood in the streets of Tikal, Mixco, Iximche, and Antigua; of ladinos and those who trod on their constant volcanoes and lakes, recognizing the blood of Guatemala.

People of massacres born in the supposed image of their laws and gods who were never true and now end up as skeletons invented by Hollywood, while the rituals of fire are the only thing that allow the ascent of fruits and grains, of copal and incense to the purity of the spirit of life.

Ignominious invaders!

This, the most irrational genocide and discrimination in the Western Hemisphere must stop. In Guatemala City, the wealthy neighbourhood lives off the most select handicrafts, which come from the heart of the Maya people, transformed into anonymous items in showcases for foreigners who will never drink the essence of the maize, nor eat the sweet fare of its kernels.

The aggression against their millennial lands must stop, which is only to satisfy the voraciousness of capitalism, which, with eyes of fire, does not understand a child's smile, a mother's caress of her offspring, or the life in the rustling treetops of the forests.

The religious poisoning by Christianity must stop. It does not matter if they are Catholic churches or even worse, the Protestant and evangelical churches that replaced persecution by the Guatemalan army and its massacres of Maya villages with the perfect brutalization of lost paradises and unimagined guilt, submission, and obedience.

Because the massacres, perpetrated by the dictators Lucas García and Ríos Montt in the early 1980s and orchestrated and financed by the United States Department of State, being genocides until now forgotten, with impunity, by the global conscience, must not be repeated.

Because above all, it is on the calendar of the coming years and the policies that will be implemented by the empires, especially that of the United States, with the pretext of defending a spurious and demented democracy that does not respect even the simplest sentiments of humanity and nature, the occupation of the lands where mineral resources lie, indispensible for the survival of their model for capitalist life and the will-o-the-wisps of the world order, whatever the cost!

Thus, how can we keep from seeing these twisted parallels between poverty and pillage; two worlds eyeing and rejecting each other; but, the latter has the obligation to intervene to end squatter settlements and the practices of people who are living in the past. Thus, they round us up in the circle of production and once again, the capitalist world, where, by Christian logic, some are more and others less; to sum up—the kingdom of the poor is not in this world.

Because it likewise has to do with economies with opposite approaches and dependent on contradictory factors, cultural differences, the construction of a scenario of the vanquished and the vanquishers, republics and aboriginal peoples, progress and backwardness, monotheistic and polytheistic religions, civilization and massacres.

An entire way of life and death that ends up being for the benefit of the dominant classes of a continent conquered by a foreign society, which invaded its lands and imposed its order, without even learning about the values it had, except for the gold and silver that penetrated their backsides and consciences.

Those who massacred 627 Maya villages and peoples do not have the right to speak in the name of Guatemala, no matter how much they fill their mouths with the name of a god that nobody recognizes, although in the CIA and the Department of State of the USA, Yes Sir! it's called Mr. Dollar.

Assassins such as Ríos Montt should be tried before the International Criminal Court in The Hague for genocide and crimes against humanity!

Now!

We demand they be judged in an international forum!

'It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall'

Mining ventures nowadays have become particularly aggressive, especially in several Latin American countries. The need for economic growth, applauded by the world's economic agencies, demands the extraction of non-renewable resources located in rural areas, harming the water, the fields, the forests, and the air we breathe. Mining unleashes a devastating chain of deadly effects on the health of people, ecosystems, and the life of the planet as a whole.

Aggravating matters, in countries including Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil, mine operators have their sights on lands where indigenous and farming peoples have lived for generations. The worldview of these ancestral peoples not only includes the need for production, an economy, and community organization, it also includes the values and principles of social reproduction that have been the foundation of their culture down through history.





Of particular concern, national governments harshly repress these extremely vulnerable communities, whose inhabitants are hit the hardest by this scourge in the time of globalization. The particular cruelty used in criminalizing social activism, branded as terrorism and called by other invectives, hearkens back to the bitterest days of the fascist dictatorships that tried to wipe out the peoples' organizations and their cry for change in the face of injustice and exploitation. But the thing is, we're now in 'peacetime' and, in some countries, we even have the leadership of governments that call themselves anti-imperialist, say they're in the socialist camp, and ascribe to themselves other pretentions.

Dark storm clouds are gathering over this new century, foretelling years of confrontation and pain, where all signs indicate that the capitalist monster, drunk on oil, is demanding new levies on the land. For the blood that was spilled only momentarily sated its voracious appetite for power. Now it demands more gold, copper, silver, nickel and so on. What took the planet millions of years to create is now being turned into consumer goods,



scrap metal, and waste.

Meanwhile, in the cities, indolent urbanites watch impassively and even scornfully as hundreds of communities protest and march in defence of their lives. Or, they simply close their eyes to the repression, death, and disappearance of grassroots leaders, the imprisonment of many others, and all the abuses by the law enforcement apparatus of modern empire.

But, they don't realize that when the springs dry up at the source, the water treatment plants in the cities will also shut down. That when the fields cease to produce, the markets and supermarkets will also be bare. And, that the cities, already teeming with millions of the unemployed, will be the last redoubt of the hoards displaced by mining.

Because of this, and much more, it is clear that only the resistance of the underdogs will halt the destruction of the environment and of the people who are still trying to live in harmony with nature. Organized struggle is the only direction for us to follow, against the wickedness of those who think they are

destined to own the world and all that exists on the face of the Earth. The latticework of fraternity and solidarity should only be woven directly from people to people, as the underpinnings for the development of an alternative system that looks with optimism on the future of humanity. Because, if it is otherwise, the storm on the horizon will leave us no opportunity for restoring our dreams.

Extractive Industry in San Juan Sacatepéquez

Inmar Orlando Baror Zet died on 12 October 2009, following a craven attack during a joint operation by the Guatemalan police, army, and paramilitary forces on the community of El Troje, in the township of San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala province. The bullets that ended his life also left his young son fatherless. His mother still grieves his loss, mired in dire poverty, since her son had been the family's sole breadwinner.

The township of San Juan Sacatepéquez is only 31 km from Guatemala City. Over 150,000 people live there, most of whom are Maya Kaqchikel, scattered about the 242 km2 of the township.





María Fidelia Set Xoc, a Maya Kaqchikel and mother of Inmar Orlando, talked with us about what happened, with the controlled rage of someone whose voice is not heard and if it is heard changes nothing in their lot in life. She tells us of her sorrows, only with the hope that the future will be different and that the contempt and abuse heaped on her people by some of mestizo society and the government will change. She tells us, through the strength of the tears that she hopes Maya mothers and women will stop having to shed, about how much they have suffered since their gods, their culture, and their lands were subjected to the designs of foreigners.

The preface to this scene of grief and indignation begins with the San José Mincesa corporation, owned by Guatemalan and Swiss (Holcim) investors, which is trying to start a cement plant in the midst of 12 Kaqchikel communities. This is the site of one of the sources of water for the area, which they zealously guard with their traditional respect, because they depend upon it to sustain their life-giving fields of maize, beans, squash, vegetables, and recently, all kinds of flowers

that they sell domestically and abroad.

To get its way, the company has used extremely vile methods of intimidation and repression, in open complicity with local authorities, the central government, and of course, the forces of 'order', which, at the service of the factory's owners, committed these barbarities. Some protesters received bullet wounds; others were sentenced to 150 years in jail for 'chemical, biological, and atomic terrorism'. Almost two years later, other leaders are still in jail awaiting trial. Many community members have also endured threats, abduction, and extortion, or have been jailed without a court order, thanks to the 'good offices' of the authorities who are seeking to clarify the events that could implicate local leaders in the alleged murder of a company employee.

Let us go back a ways to understand just what is going on here:

In September 2006, several outsiders came into the Kaqchikel communities with surveying equipment. They were engineers and architects from the Cementos Progreso Company. At first, they were talking about a road that was supposed to be built. But little by little they started trespassing on people's yards, lands, and fields. The crew was always accompanied by two or three well-armed security guards.

This was followed by the systematic destruction of crops at night by hooded men. The local people and their own authorities, who had no idea why this was happening, turned to the municipal authorities. At first they said they were unaware of the problem, but finally said that Cementos Progreso was going to produce cement at the San José Ocaña hacienda, which was going to help the locals by giving them jobs, etc., etc.

In January 2007, hooded surveyors also went to El Pilar I and El Pilar II, in the township of Santo Domingo de Xenacoj, this time accompanied by the police. The community reacted and detained three individuals who were taken to the town hall where they were written up, and the detainees promised there would be no more operations of this type.



But like a soap opera that repeats the same events, only changing the names of the characters and the scene, the same methods that extractive industries use the world over finally came to San Juan Sacatepéquez. That is, first they tried to 'legally' expropriate land surrounding the hacienda. Then they tried to buy the property. Finally, they splintered the community's unity by buying off several of the locals who were anxious to work and to even advocate for the cement company.

Naturally, several NGOs got involved to provide 'technical' aid and convince the Kaqchikels about the help offered by the cement company and the immediate and long-term benefits they would obtain, not to mention the lecture on the 'cutting-edge technology' they used to bait and switch them.

Deception was also part of the package. In complicity with AgroBosque, a reforestation company, a bag of cement and two seedlings were handed out, as a message that environmental improvement was coming along with the cement. However, along with the gift, a parent had to sign a form giving the family's name and address along with his or her personal identity document number. One can only assume that the company would later use these signatures as "proof" of community support. The community members reacted by detaining the forestry workers and their vehicles, and after explaining the community's position on extractive industries, took the workers to the village and left them in the hands of the authorities. Days later, four community members who had not even participated in this action were accused of kidnapping; later the number rose to 15.

Following these events, arrests continued and the harassment took on a more menacing tone, terrorizing the people of San Juan Sacatepéquez. Things came to a head on 14 December 2007 when, taking advantage of a gathering of the 12 communities in Santa Fe Ocaña that was called to pray for the detainees, police attacked the crowd with tear gas. In a scene reminiscent of the worst of the genocidal repression, they arrested 15 leaders, who were tried, as we mentioned above, for 'chemical, biological, and atomic terrorism'. We are not sure if this last item is there in open acknowledgement of Maya wisdom and science, or from wilful ignorance that rises to the level of a crime against the most basic of human logic.

On 22 June 2008, the situation was tense. The company moved its heavy machinery for widening the road to the Concepción farm, which it owns, damaging local roads. In response to this assault, the community authorities asked the mayor, Marta Sican de Coronada to intervene in the affair, but she only sent a few council members to the site. This annoyed the local residents, who shouted anti-mining slogans. The response was immediate: the farm's guards fired, wounding several protesters. That night, Francisco Tepeu, a company worker, died. Neighbours of the dead man said that:

"...[S]everal hooded men came; they tied him up and took him to La Auxiliadora. Later they took him outside; they beat him and that is where he died. We assume it was the company itself to create more conflict among us."

The "Tepeu Movement" was immediately formed, made up of local residents who work for the cement company and defend it as if it were theirs. President Álvaro Colom declared a state of emergency in the entire township. On 23 June, 2,000 soldiers and police fanned out among the western communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez and arrested 43 individuals, including several minors. Women were raped and adults abducted, as well as a child, María Josefina Díaz Zet.

Inmar Orlando Baror Zet was gutlessly murdered as he was passing by a meeting of people in El Troje who were preparing for a protest march. His companion, who was also shot, said that Baror Zet rebuked two outsiders because they were threatening people; before the young indigenous man was shot in the head, one of them said "...I could kill a ton of these despicable Indians in a minute". According to his account, the two individuals were later detained in Santa Lucia and it is not known what happened to them.

Days later, a Dialogue Roundtable met, convened by the Secretariat for Peace, with the involvement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and representatives from the Church, the Rigoberta Menchú Foundation, CONIC (the National Indigenous and Peasant Coalition), and the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, with no result other than promises, still unmet.

On 22 April 2010, International Earth Day, over 10,000 indigenous people from around Guatemala City who had been affected by mining, marched to the Government Palace, demanding fulfilment of the agreements signed between the national government and indigenous organizations. These agreements included deadlines and the conditions for their implementation, yet time just marches on....



As we say our goodbyes, words fail us as we are overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. What can we say? 'We hope you're well, have a good day, good luck, best wishes to your family', and so forth? These feeble statements seem so contradictory in the face of such hard-hitting reality, marked by the indelible image of human suffering caused by other humans in their crazed frenzy for power.

María Fidelia returns to her visible shell of solitude. We head back to our obligatory cry of protest and denouncement, because to remain silent in the face of injustice is to be part of the cowardly silence with which the murderers caress their children.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

An endless night

Dagma, of Maya Mam descent, health worker (Chiapas State, Mexico):

"Chiapas used to belong to Guatemala. When Mexico annexed this territory 130 years ago, native people were forbidden to speak their language and wear their attire. People who resisted speaking Spanish got their tongues cut out. Their clothes were burned as well."

Dany, Mapuche Indian and physician at Port Saavedra (Region VIII - Chile):

"Let's not forget that there was the Treaty of Las Canoas, where the Spanish crown recognized the autonomous territory of the Mapuche people, from Bio Bio to the south. (...) After Chile became independent in 1810, a series of armed manoeuvres using a non-professional army attempted to unite the autonomous Mapuche territory with the rest of the country. Finally, after the War of the Pacific in 1881, the professional Chilean army, under the command of Colonel Saavedra, initiated an onslaught to permanently unite it with Chile. However, this was not done through dialogue, but rather through killing, rape, burning our towns. They killed children, women, and old folks. The same happened on the Argentine side.... So, we are not talking about 500 years, or 300, or 200 years....

"In the 20th century, another strategy for political domination was developed, involving Catholicism, and where foreigners came to settle the 'unoccupied' lands, as they used to say. With Pinochet, the Mapuche people were practically exterminated. A rather clear example was the dictatorship's practice of the arbitrary sterilization of our women. (...) And now, with the hydroelectric projects, we have 3,600 hectares of native forest that are flooded; our holy places were also flooded, our cemeteries and our houses."

Gabriel, member of the community health and education support team, Chiapas, Mexico:

"We had an experience in one area where integration was very brutal. People do not identify themselves as members of the Mam people; it was that severe, this integration policy. This happened in the '30s, in the '40s in the last century, when the border between Mexico and Guatemala had to be drawn. The Mam on the Mexican side of the border were forced to burn their clothes; the children were punished if they spoke the language... it was very intense."

Ruth, an Inga native and a lawyer (Putumayo Valley, Colombia - Foundation of Indigenous Professionals):

"Currently, due to the problems with violence in Colombia because of the conflict, I do not live in my town. (...) The situation for displaced women and children is really hard. They have suffered a lot. (...) People are also going hungry from the aerial spraying. The land is sick."

Diana, Peruvian, and a health worker at the Civil Society Forum for Health (Lima):

"In the case of Ica where there was an earthquake (...), two years have gone by, and the issue of housing has not been solved. The National Human Rights Commission recently wrote a press release saying that field hospitals [that are tents] continue functioning as such, but are no good in emergencies; the new equipment is out in the open and the government has not even laid the first stone yet for a real hospital."

Santiago, Argentine doctor (Buenos Aires):

"I work at a national hospital and with the migrant Bolivian population: one of the most long-suffering people I know. Because these are people who have left their culture, their place, and have come to our country, where they are discriminated against, exploited. They cannot be integrated because our country rejects poor people who come from other countries like Bolivia."

Yonatan, Afro-descendent Venezuelan, homosexual, and General Director of Venezuela Diversa (Caracas):

"We work with indigenous people who have fled discrimination in their communities; there are also people of African descent and European background born in Venezuela. We also work to restore the rights of 'trans' groups, who are people whose right to health has been violated, as it has been for us gays. By forcing us to adjust to the heterosexual pattern, the binary system, the system of exclusion or domination of others. (...) This is how our right to health is violated ... and this frustrates and depresses us; it even causes violence among us and at times, violence toward other groups. (...) [As for trans people], the government does not recognize the right of these people to control their own bodies, their personality. (...) And since there are no public health policies for these cases, and to get the body they want, they turn to dangerous methods, such as sex work to subsist, they inject themselves with airplane or automobile oil or distilled water to enlarge their breasts. (...) Many end up with serious infections that kill them."

Constanza, Argentina, community psychologist (Cordoba):

"Argentina is a Catholic country, and that is where I felt the greatest obstacles for women to be able to live their sexuality freely, their reproduction. It seems to me that it has to do with permanent control of women's bodies, above all in poor sectors, and also because sexual and reproductive health is viewed through a medical model; therefore, the issues of sexuality and reproduction get lumped together."

David, a Nicaraguan who calls himself 'multiethnic', from Miskito, mestizo, and Creole stock, is a village health worker in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region:

"To the new generation of Miskitos, living well is going to have a different meaning due to the influence of globalization, and television has had a big influence because a lot of young people do not understand this. They have even gotten to the point of disrespecting the council of elders, the community leaders, and it is becoming a very capitalistic generation. So this model that the government has been implementing, the new generation is adopting it, and now look at what's happening. We have a very serious situation here: young community leaders are negotiating directly with extractive industries, whether at sea, or with lumber, or in the mines."

Crisanta, Maya Kaqchikel Indian - Guatemala: Mining concession area in San Miguel Ixtahuacán - Guatemala:

"The company came to offer many things, but we did not accept them because of the problems they are causing. Not only are they digging where they bought land 11 to 12 years ago, but we found out that they are working on buying more land. So, we do not agree with this, because if the company is going to continue buying land, then where will we go? What will we leave for our children to inherit, for those who come after us? Because we are realizing that not only is there gold in the communities of Nueva Esperanza and San José, but that it is all over San Miguel, even all over Guatemala....

"So I did not make an agreement with them: that is why they got an arrest warrant for me; the police came... but that year they did not arrest me. That was in 2008....

"And last year was when the company began to buy land in a place where we have other people living, who have been in the resistance, and they do not want to sell their land because it protects their springs. And they went in to buy, and before the company negotiated with those neighbours, we asked them not to buy in that place. When the company bought it, they went in to drill, but we went to talk with them, peacefully, to ask them to remove their machinery. They stopped working for two weeks; later they set up their machinery again, close to where the spring was. Then the local residents asked them not to dig there, and to remove their machinery, but they did not respect this. We invited people from other

communities to support us. Here in San Miguel, there are people who do not speak Spanish; so I was asked to talk to the company manager. The company people came, and I talked with them, I told them what the problem was, why the people were opposed: because they depend on their springs.... Since we did not get a response, the people got mad and burned a car that was parked there and the drilling machine. The company got another arrest warrant for me. I was at home when they called to say that the police were already there. This was in the June last year [2009]. So I had to leave; I went away from San Miguel township; I stayed somewhere else for six months. In December, I went home again. However, a month after I got home, they caught me. However, I am not alone, thank God; many communities are supporting me, they got me out in a community in Las Escobas. And here I am. I am grateful to the comrades that are with us now, who are in the resistance.

"The workers told the company people to sue me and the community, to get me out of the community. But, they couldn't do it; they could not get me out of the community. That was when they cut off my water. It took a lot of work for us to get our water tap in front of our house, and now they have left us without water....

"The company threatens me saying that if I am going to continue to be against mining, that if they can't get me arrested, they are going to abduct me, and if they catch me, they are going to put me in jail for 50 years. This worries me a lot because I have small children; if my children were not young, I would give my life for my people, but unfortunately it is because of my children, that is what worries me the most.... When I was away from home, my children did not go to school anymore; my boy failed his grade.... This is what I worry about the most....

"I know another seven comrades with arrest warrants....

"Before the mining company came here to San Miguel, we were okay, even though we made our money here in the plantations; back then, we used to go work and pick coffee, from August to December or January. And we lived a happier life because when we finished working there, we would come back here to our homes, happy to be among our neighbours. We would visit our neighbours, our relatives.... But ever since the company came, everything has been destroyed. Because now our neighbours who work for the mine do not want to see us anymore, neither do our families; even our parents, our brothers have turned against us, and that is the saddest thing that the company has caused. We used to get along fine with our relatives, but now it has all been the destruction of our families, and between communities....

"People have died because of the pollution.

Last year a man died. What he told us is that he went into a spring to bathe. The man caught a skin disease and died. They took him to the hospital, and the doctors said that they had never seen that disease here, and it had no cure. Besides that, last year a man died here; today is the anniversary of his death. He was a company worker. He worked over where the tailings pond is. Another one also died of the same disease, from the pollution, and others are sick now. So, this worries us a lot. Besides this, a mechanic died: there was a problem with the acid drainage: the pipe burst, and the used water, which is where the cyanide is, spilled everywhere, all over the young man's body.

"In the lowlands, they plant tomatoes, near the coast, and that is where the tailings pond is, and the water seeps into the river, and this is the water the tomato producers irrigate with.»

Mother of Inmar Orlando Baror Zet; Cement factory area in San Juan Sacatapéquez - Guatemala:

"Because of that company I lost him, my son. And he was the only one I had. I am a widow; and, my son, I lost him. Now I am alone. I accuse that company [the cement company]; I do not want it here in this country. Because they cause us a lot of harm, a lot of sorrow, they bring us many bad things. We didn't used to have this problem: we loved each other; the neighbours loved each other. And now, among us, there is a lot of jealousy because of the company."

Pablo, Afro-descendent Uruguayan, and Director of AMISEU (Association of Sexual Minorities of Uruguay):

"We, as different native groups, are demanding that ethnic groups be recognized as such. Uruguay is a particular case, because the Aruba population was wiped out many years ago. Just recently, a small movement has started among their descendants, and the Afro-descendants who have perhaps been fighting for even longer. We want to defend the right to be recognized as ethnic groups, and to have the cultural diversity in our country be taken into consideration.... In Uruguay, we accept different sexual orientations in the construct of gender. But beyond legal advances, in practice, this is not being respected. We are working for true inclusion."

Dagmar, mestizo descendent of the Mam Maya, health worker (Chiapas State, Mexico):

"Among the Tzotzil Indians, women are seen as only good for making children and doing housework. The more a woman works the better. Tzotzil women are still sold into marriage, without realizing it, until the man shows up at her parents' house. The family sells her for bottles of Coca Cola or liquor, and some food. (...) If women say they do not want to marry, they have to pay that debt to the

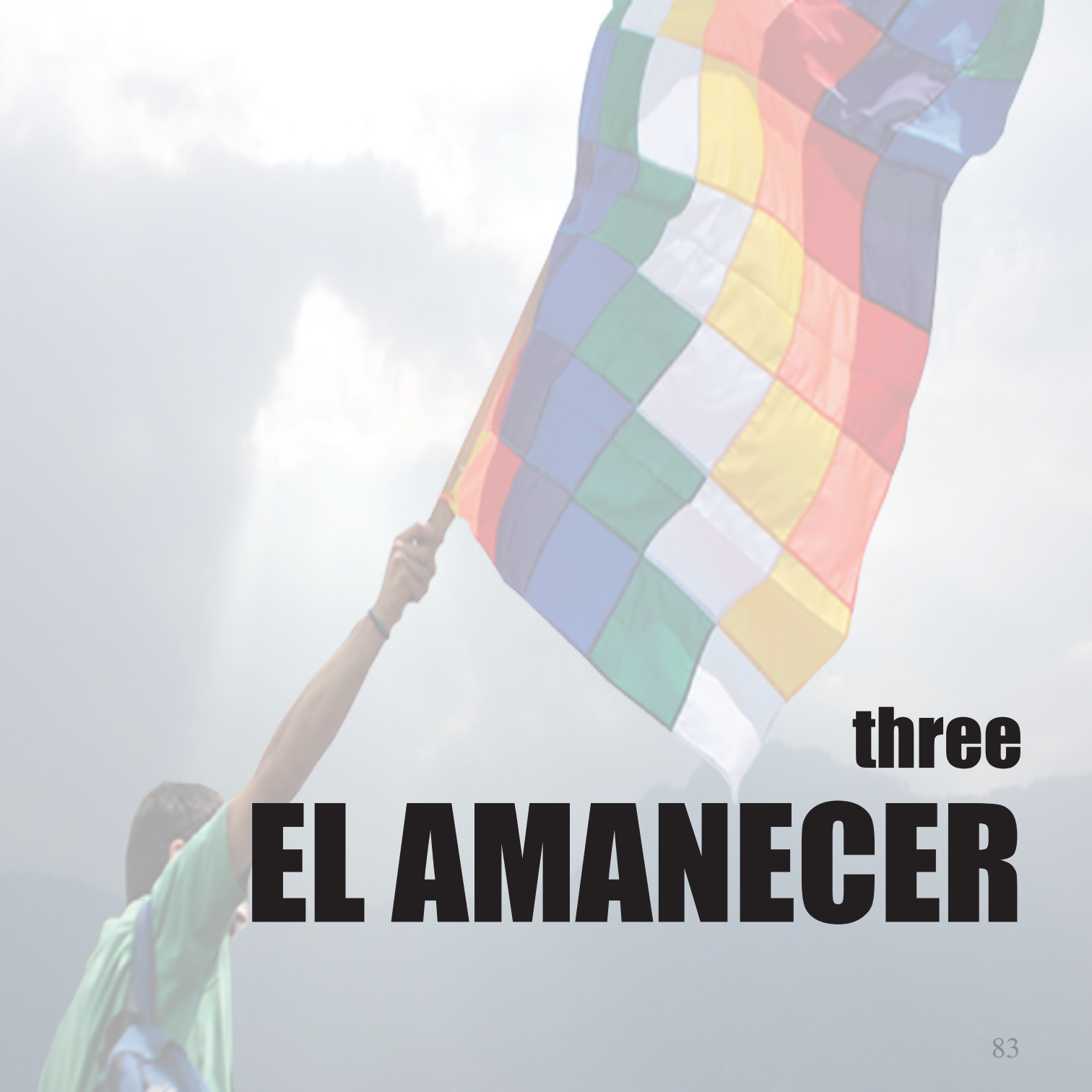
community and they are shunned, as they are seen as disobedient."

Rosenda, Kaqchikel Maya, Guatemala:

"'Machismo' in the communities is still strong; but it is not a traditional practice, rather it was introduced to make the men idiots, make the communities idiots.... From the '60s to the '80s, these years served to train men, to put power into their minds to dominate others, to kill others, to hate others. These men were great murderers of their brothers and sisters: there were rapes, torture, devastated land. We come from devastated lands ... but this ideology that the army introduced into the men persists today. With the signing of the peace, we are not happy and content. No. We are still at war: the wars are in the homes, the wars are in the families, the war is in the people themselves....







three
EL AMANECER

THE MYTH

Tombs of the ancestors

This is my recollection of the tombs of our ancestors whose memory has not disappeared, only the tombs.

These are the tombs of Qomoyuc Tata Queh and Pacal Carney, neighbours of Zakbin, neighbours of the two planting plots of Qolón.

This is the tomb of Qomoyuc Tata Tzutuhil, neighbour of Zotz, neighbour of Xincú, neighbour of Ragag.

This is the tomb of the late grandfather Qulahay and of Qulahay Tzián, the eldest son of the late grandfather Qulahay, also a neighbour of Xincú, neighbour of Zaquil, neighbour of the one called Tata Noh.

Here are the tombs of Pacal Carney and the Pacal Canux, which is next to Ixmaleh, and next to Tecumat Iq, and next to Tecumat Tata Can.

This is the tomb of the late grandfather Vuchumanel and Bahán Coktí. Grandfather Vuchumanel is also neighbour to Xitayul Tata Tzián, neighbour to Zotz, neighbour to Tunal Tata Ganel.

This is the tomb of the Xulumatatt, Xulumatat Batzín, and Xulumatat Gatú of Chakayaal Ixpón and Pacal Tata Txtziquinahay of Tzala.

When they lived, Oxlahuh Tzíi reigned in Yximchee* over the Ratzamut with the great men Xahil and the great men Chopená Balam, and the great men Xitayul Qatú, and the great men Pacal Queh, our grandfathers.

So, the inhabitants of the fields, the inhabitants of the town, are dust now among the walls of the tombs. Their faces are there, but their memory has not disappeared, and thus I write my recollection. I, Diego López, Young Pacal, Friday, the tenth day of April.

* Capital of the Kaqchikels at the time of the Spanish invasion.

Memorial de Sololá, Anales de los Kaqchiqueles, Título de los Señores de Totonicapán. Pages 161-162. Version by Adrian Recinos. Piedra Santa Editorial. 2008 Guatemala.

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POEM

Bulletin and Elegy of Indian Enslavement (excerpt)

But one day I returned. And now I return!
Now I am Santiago Agag, Roque Buestende,
Mateo Comaguara, Esteban Cuchitaipe, Pablo Duchinachay,
Gregorio Guartatana, Francisco Nati -
Cañar, Bartolomé Dumbay!

And now, all this land is mine.
From Llangagua to Burgay;
From Irubí to Buerán;
from Guaslán, to Punsara, passing through
Biblián.

And it is mine on the inside, like a woman at night.
And it is mine all the way up, beyond the sparrow hawk.

I return, I ascend in flight!
I rise after the Third Century, from among the Dead!
With the dead, I come!
The Indian Tomb twists with all its hips,
its breasts and wombs.
The Great Tomb arches itself and rises
after the Third Century, among the hills and the wilderness,
From the rivers, where we perished in troops.
From the mines, where
we perished in rosaries.
From Death, where we perished in kernels.

I return.
We return! Pachacámac!

I am Juan Atampam! Myself, as well!
I am Marcos Guamán! Myself, as well!
I am Roque Jadán! Myself, as well!
Comaguara, I am. Gualanlema, Quilaquilago, Caxicóndor,

Pumacuri, Tomayco, Cuchitaype, Guartatana,
Duchnachay, Dumbay, I am!
We are! We will be! I am.

César Dávila Andrade. Editorial Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, Quito, 1975.



ARTICLES

From spirituality, the people's struggle!

Doj-Noj, the Maya altar is prepared. All the ingredients are laid out for the connection with the nahual (spirit familiar) Kawoq. The spiritual guides known as Aj'kij have arrived early, while the IPHU attendees, some restless, others expectant of the ritual that is soon to begin, but joyful and smiling, greet each other and settle in around the circle of stones that is already transformed into the centre of a sacred space ruled by Fire.

One by one, the offerings that will be consumed by the Xaml dance are set down. These are the copal and pitch pine, incense and sugarloaf, flowers, fruit, and grain, basil, rosemary, and honey, lined up along the cardinal points: first toward the east, where the sun will rise; across from this, the west,



with the kingdom of the night; the north, where the wind blows; and the south, with the freshwater spring. The colours that correspond to the four corners of the Earth are evenly distributed, but the circle embraces the Universe.

With the fire lit, the ritual commences, invoking all the energies of the cosmos and distributing them among those present. Everything points to understanding by the people and their profound relationship to the Earth, plants, animals, water. In our complicit silence, I ponder:

How much ignorance of spirit did the invaders bring to these lands over 500 years ago, so that they were unable to understand the richness and depth of this kind of message, full of vitality and joy? While they, avid for gold, were only able to inflict the empire of barbarity that tastes of death and pain.

There is also an urgent need to give another meaning to the word 'sacred', as it is not a simple religious notion, but on the contrary, a category of primordial teaching and accord between our being and the rest, with the unity of everything that surrounds us, and that gives meaning to existence itself.

Therefore, the people's struggle – not only





the native people, because it is up to all of humanity to combat social injustice and inequity – must include in this new millennium the practice of a militant spirituality to explain and practice the keys to living well, whose essence is full of basic principles and knowing how to share. Thus, the building of a new society committed to life will not be a simple speech or useless actions that bleed the poorest, because it will have as a general rule respect for and understanding of diversity, as occurs with the components of the Maya altar, contained in a single body that the circle embraces.

This morning, something struck the depths of our understanding. The birds never ceased to accompany us with their song; the wind cooled the temperature lit by the sacred fire. Thus began a new day, laden with dreams and expectations.

The energy was bestowed upon us!

Now it is up to us to walk and catch death, before she devours us without having fulfilled our commitments.

Intercultural health

In some countries of Latin America, we have been discussing interculturalism for over 25 years. The result of this long and often unproductive process is that some countries have included the terms multicultural, multiethnic, and even multinational in their new constitutions. Other countries began the debate later, while others have yet to discuss the issue, or simply ignore it.

This gives the impression of a world with profound differences, and this of course is true. In this immense territory with its cultural, social, and political differences, the roads to travel are difficult, if not impossible, at least for now.

At the IPHU in Chimaltenango, the participants discussed this issue in work groups, agreeing and disagreeing, leading us to understand that many of the terms that have been discussed in recent years have arisen from the thinking of intellectuals and academics interested more in epistemological categories than in understanding the concrete needs of the people involved. Therefore, until the people themselves decide what direction they want to take, the debate will continue to be drawn out, and removed from the reality it seeks to change.

This means that the recognition and affirmation of identities within the cultural unity of native and Afro-descendent peoples is the only guarantee that a true discussion of traditional knowledge will establish a bridge to the authentic practice of interculturalism, which will always remain outside of the purview of the laws and expediency of national governments.



Alongside these thoughts, we also need to take into account the relationship and contradictions between society and its natural environment, given that culture is nothing more than the result of that ever-shifting



dynamic, within which the interrelationship among human groups becomes meaningful, whether through their familial relationships or differences, but always in the quest for knowing how to share and exist with the unique elements in each human community.

Meanwhile, to the extent that nature is continuing to deteriorate and ethnic groups' lands are being encroached upon, it is becoming more urgent to reach agreements, especially on the defence of the places where people live, which in the end are the basis of social reproduction and the survival of the planet, without which, good intentions, no matter what their source, would be worthless.

International Earth Day

April 22 will not go unnoticed in Guatemala, and in many countries of the world, particularly in those where a majority or an important segment of the population is indigenous or traditional peoples. In Guatemala City, 10,000 people, representing the great Maya unity—Q'eqchi', Pocomchi', Quiché, Ixil, Xinca, Poceman, Q'anjobal, Mam, Rabinal Achi, and Tzutujil—marched across town, travelling 10 kilometres to reach the Presidential Palace. Many other marches took place around the country, both in the cities and the countryside, and the call in defence of the Earth was heard deep in the consciences, or at least in the ears, of the people.



Women and men wearing multicoloured clothing. Community authorities carrying their staffs of office and other symbols, many of them wearing elegant suits and hats. Young mothers bearing their little children on their backs, elderly women with dignity and pain carved into their faces, smiling but restless children, some barefooted and hand-in-hand with their parents. Overall, a mosaic of human and cultural expressions that awaited the final instructions to set off on the march.

Thus began the demonstration in defence of the Earth: walking in double file, disciplined, from El Obelisco monument, heading toward downtown. Then, like streams flowing down side streets into the great torrent that is La Reforma Avenue, hundreds of people swelled the multitude, which quickly grew. Sound trucks broadcasted slogans for life and against the activities meant to sacrifice



the Earth, down to its bowels, to increase wealth and political power over communities and people that are only seeking a dignified, peaceful life. The marchers also sang and chanted specific slogans and their specific demands.

However, the marchers' euphoria contrasted with the attitude of those who looked on silently and passively as they passed by. Is there an estrangement between the urban population in Guatemala and the indigenous communities? Because it is obvious that, except for a face here or there, the identity among the vast majority of the country's inhabitants comes from the same origin, and culturally they are recognizable, even beyond the differences created by the hegemonic groups, both during the colonial period and after independence. Things that must be answered by that urgency to redefine identities beyond the political and ideological





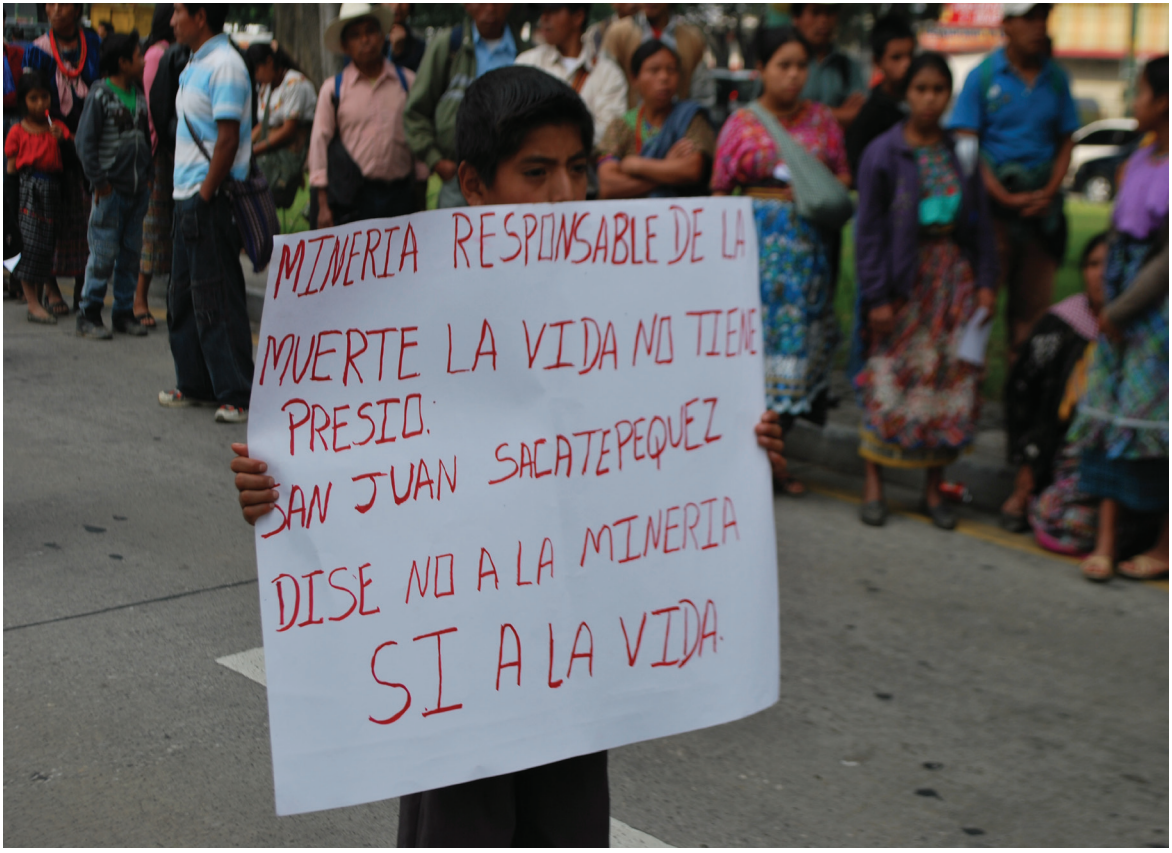
game that can be seen in the history of the last five centuries of an invaded and colonized hemisphere. It could also be because certain issues, like the specific one for this day, are not on the calendar of urban protest, given that the environment is not important or is invisible, except of course, the pollution everywhere.

Focusing again on the event, equally important were the protests against the mining companies, cement companies, oil production, mega water projects, and African palm and sugarcane plantations that are destroying nature and dividing communities, in the midst of the most savage repression. The voices that were heard were those of San Juan Sacatepéquez and San Miguel Ixtahuacán, which have been affected by the actions of powerful local families in partnership with multinational corporations from Canada, Switzerland, the United States, Spain, and other so-called 'First World' countries.

During the march, delegations of leaders visited the respective embassies, housed in lavish buildings in the modern part of Guatemala City, the same embassies that flaunt the invisible power of the owners of the world. The objective of these visits was to deliver demands in writing to stop mining in Guatemala. As to be expected, coincidentally or not, the diplomats were not in, as they were away on business, receiving new orders perhaps, who knows?

When the march reached downtown, the document was also delivered to the Supreme Court and to the legislature. But, to no avail! All the authorities were busy. Whatever!

Then, with their staffs of office and other symbols of community power in hand, and backed by the entire march, the leaders demanded to see the president, knowing that he could not meet with the group because he was meeting with the mayor of San Juan Sacatepéquez. The mayor then shamelessly





attempted to address the crowd, but she was shouted down and accused of being a traitor to her people and a sell-out to the interests of the cement-company's owners.

Two public officials, watchfully escorted by security guards, came to the door and accepted the document. In it, the protesters called for compliance with the requirements of the United Nations and other mediating organizations, which had intervened following the violent incidents surrounding the police repression in the villages and towns in the San Juan region.

The march ended at two in the afternoon with a political rally in the central square of Guatemala City that included speeches by the march's leaders. They stressed that this was the final conciliatory action; once the deadline in the document passes, the indigenous communities will take other routes to making their voice be heard.

They are hoping that these actions will not taken as acts of terrorism — the convenient excuse — to unleash all the hatred of the bourgeoisie against those that attempt to undermine their system of exploitation and misery.

Ancestral health systems in Latin America

A history of over 10,000 years of continuous human occupation in what is now Latin America has led to the emergence of extremely diverse peoples, although with overlapping cultures. These differences are visible to the naked eye, particularly between the large geographic regions comprising this immense territory.

The Americas in general, in this case from the Rio Grande to Tierra de Fuego, can be divided into large regions that share certain physical and environmental features, geographic location, and ultimately, the borders of the modern nation-states, each with its own particular distinguishing characteristics. There are six of these: the Andean region, the Amazon basin, Patagonia, the Caribbean, Central America, and Mesoamerica.

Each of these regions is also a mosaic of differences in elevation and latitude, landscape, climate, and soils that form diverse ecosystems comprised of complex chains of life of flora and fauna. While these interrelationships are unique networks, their borders are permeable, enabling mixing of their components, especially in what are known as transition zones.

Over these ten millennia, humans have been continuously learning from and interacting with the major and minor components of these geographic regions. Culture, in the broadest sense of the word, developed in this constant confrontation with the environmental characteristics of each area. In overcoming the contradictions that arise in this relationship, and finally, intimately connected to with it, strategies emerge that are crucial for physical survival. Alongside this, ideological systems that support the world of cultural expressions develop, including religious traditions and practices regarding health and physical, psychological, and social healing.

In other words, in Latin America we experience relationships that are, on the one hand, linked to the dialectical nature of the natural environment and an understanding of nature's general and specific laws in each region. On the other hand, we are part of the development and evolution of a body of values that consolidated millennia ago, based in the ancestral culture of our people, much of which has survived until the present, evolving from a long historical process of change and permanence.

Thus, the six geographic regions described above contain diverse cultural systems, as well as lesser internal differences, even if they outwardly appear uniform. These cultures are directly tied to their natural livelihoods, making them unique. They hold an enormous





wealth of knowledge, including not only practices that support communication and ties among members of the communities involved, but also recognition of the properties and uses of the resources of each area.

Along these lines, if we consider health, prevention, and the curing of diseases as practices that have been designed down through the centuries, then it is evident that all the peoples of Latin America possess an immense store of knowledge, which has been maintained. New concepts, values, and healing agents have been integrated, and others modified, depending on different historical and social conditions. This has been particularly true in recent centuries, from the incursion of factors exogenous to the life and culture of these peoples.

In this light, we must reflect on certain aspects and, naturally, take certain measures.

Are these systems in danger of disappearing definitely in the face of the advances of modern society, which gives preference to the concept of Western science over traditional practices in the field of health and healing?

Have these systems been studied and systematized sufficiently?

Has this huge body of knowledge been appropriately publicized, to ensure it is not relegated to the realm of quackery, or at best that of «primitive knowledge»?

Has enough been done — by governments and society in general — to recognize the worth of and promote this knowledge and these practices, which can be alternatives to the splintered, costly medical system?

Responses to these and other issues can be found in our own experiences and in anthropological research.

The survival of these systems is actually in danger due to several reasons, among which is that they are categorized as non-scientific knowledge, and as barely useful for easing minor ailments. Likewise, vulgarization of the practices has taken place in recent years, reducing them to simple empiricism or even witchcraft. For this same reason, this is a dangerous stage, if ancestral health systems are to remain, maintaining at least their original conceptualization and the approval of the true cultivators of this knowledge.

Furthermore, although academia has made important efforts studying and systematizing ancestral health systems, to date there is no real register of the entire body of knowledge about these systems in Latin America. Much of the information about them was collected with the consequent dismembering of the knowledge, which then appears as isolated pieces. We then lose sight of the unity in the basic principle noted above; that is, the preponderant relationship between culture and the environment, and thereby between health systems and the natural environment surrounding every society that develops such a system.

Therefore, there has been no true convergence among practices, comprehensive study of the systems, or their recognition by society through documentation of their principles, resources, values, and usage, even though we now have considerable means for mass dissemination through the media— digital, television, radio, print, and so on. We urgently need to teach society about the underpinnings, advantages, and affirmation of Latin American identities, which are expressed in important aspects such as the recognition of the fundamental unity of humans and nature, which now more than ever needs to be protected as a source of health and life.

Finally, even though many Latin American countries have taken important steps in recognizing ancestral knowledge about health, it must be recognized that they have not been enough. We need the mutual effort of national institutions, international health institutions, social researchers, and



communicators, together with the principal stakeholders, that is, the ancestral peoples and ethnic groups, to develop a mechanism that will truly make it possible to have ancestral health systems as an alternative to modern medicine.

This is needed because it is also fundamental to establish some differences between these two systems of health theory and practice. First, the modern one, called Western medicine, does not see the mind and body as one. It focuses on such tiny aspects of each that it eventually loses sight of the integration of individuals with their parts, or even worse, with their direct relationship with family and society. On the other hand, the ancestral vision of health considers each facet of human beings as fundamental parts of an interrelated whole. Therefore, this whole is defined as a set of systems that include a fifth category, based on the natural

environment that surrounds and is tied to every human grouping and individuals in particular. This means that the first system loses its universal role, in which it addresses phenomena, classified as illness. This is differentiated from the second system, which sees the whole picture and, within it, physical or psychological illness as the detonator that breaks the balance in some portion of its members.

Additionally, ancestral systems see health as a requisite for people to have a harmonious life with the social group and the environment. They use local resources to cure illnesses, particularly plants, and collective or private rituals where relatives or other members of the group are present. This is not done in modern medicine, which acts solely when an illness occurs, seeking to isolate the patient and to create a direct relationship between the patient and the physician.

The economic aspect must also be addressed, since there is a radical difference between the cost of medicine and treatment in the modern medical system and the alternative methods of ancestral health systems, which provide an alternative for the vast majority of the people in Latin American countries, whose standard of living excludes them from establishment medicine.

However, there is a possibility for a dual medical and health care system, based on a rational recognition and appraisal of both types of practice. These can complement each other, particularly in addressing culture-bound illnesses that belong to social groups with their own priorities, worldview, and ways of thinking.

This is the framework for the current project to research, systematize, and publicize the ancestral health systems practiced by the people and ethnic groups of the six geographic regions making up the Latin America of the 21st century.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Interculturalism as a paradigm for the dawn of Abya Yala

Ruth, Inga Indian and lawyer (Putumayo Valley, Colombia - Foundation of Indigenous Professionals):

"I define it [interculturalism] as our people define it. It is something like, as our elders say, looking at 'Taita Kuychi'. You look at the Rainbow and it has many colours, so many. And it is beautiful to behold such diversity and we see that each colour has something attractive about it, something that is touching. People are the same; we are different, and each one of us has a lot to do, a lot to tell, a lot to live.

"And the colours do not run into each other; each has space. So, these spaces for life— we deserve them. And if we all get along in harmony, in balance, with a lot of tolerance, with a lot of patience, and above all with a lot of respect, that unity in the whole will show— very beautiful— and that is what the Rainbow is."

Pablo, Afro-descendent Uruguayan, and Director of AMISEU (Association of Sexual Minorities of Uruguay):

"Interculturalism that comes from our feeling, our knowing, and based on our doing allows us to put into practice our cultural knowledge to help obtain good quality health, good comprehensive health."

Saúl Pauu, Kaqchikel Indian and Maya health worker (ASECSA, Chimaltenango-Guatemala)

"As Maya peoples, in principle we have to get to know ourselves. Interculturalism ... is learned in the family, later ... among cultures, we learn what multiculturalism is. To the government, its meaning is in its legal system, only ink and paper. However, in practice, we have resisted for over 500 years; but we are also a culture that is 5,126 years old, and we have a political system, an economic system, inherited from our grandparents, but we also have a social organization that is gaining strength daily, it is gaining strength in this country.

Abad, Tenek Indian (Huastec) and Director of the National Centre for Aid to Indigenous Missions (Vera Cruz State, Mexico):

"In Mexico, we have a variety of cultures, a variety of peoples, a variety of languages. (...) Interculturalism takes place in relation to these peoples ... through a unique worldview of life,

of health, of wisdom, of ways of approaching life. (...) The Nahuatl and the Huastec maintain a very close relationship, not only with their language and in their ways of organizing themselves, but also in their medicine. One can see how Nahuatl knowledge helps, strengthens Tepehuane and Huastec knowledge."

Leticia, Kaqchikel Maya Indian and ASECSA facilitator - Chimaltenango (Guatemala):

"From my experience in ASECSA, many of the [health] practices are very similar. For instance, at national gatherings, health workers and midwives share knowledge about illnesses, or about cases of attending births; for instance, they deal with complicated births."

Rosario, Bolivian doctor of Aymara descent (Candelaria Women's Organization):

"Making interculturalism with the women in this organization is like integrating into the existing work: political, economic, health (...), depending on the characteristics of each community. We see interculturalism as integration."

Viviana, health worker, Bolivia:

"We are entering headlong into a new paradigm of life, a change in human civilization, where we urgently need to reconnect with our roots; the paradigm of unity is our new guide if we want to change the destructive system that we have been taught.»

Carla, Bolivian mestizo, health worker in Aymara communities and jails:

"We need to define the issue of interculturalism as a third space set up within respect and tolerance, ... from the processes of identification, to the actions that are carried out."

Elio, Peruvian volunteer health worker at IMPAVIH (Information on Living with HIV/AIDS):

"Interculturalism is sharing among several cultures, not only natives or indigenous people, ... based on mutual respect."

Diana, Peruvian health promoter for the 'Civil Society Forum on Health-Lima':

"It has to do with sharing wisdom, different opinions; that is, everything that encompasses the history of a people and makes it fit together."

Alta Gracia, Dominican Afro-descendent Paediatrician (Plan International):

"Living with Haitians enables us to work on interculturalism. Interculturalism allows us to live with cultures through mutual respect, where we can all be involved, to be able to maintain the balance of life."

Yonatan, Afro-descendent Venezuelan, homosexual, and General Director of 'Venezuela Diversa':

"I see interculturalism on three levels or stages: the first is to recover our original knowledge. The second is a harmonious and respectful sharing of this knowledge to develop the third, an opportunity where we can move toward a utopian existence, thanks to respect and complementarity. In sexually diverse populations, we all have something in common: what we want and experience a different way, according to the sexual orientation we choose, because we have a gender identity."

Leticia, Kaqchikel Maya Indian and ASECSA facilitator - Chimaltenango (Guatemala):

"It is like the harmonious coexistence that can take place among cultures, with mutual respect."

David, a Nicaraguan who calls himself 'multiethnic', from Miskito, mestizo, and Creole stock, is a village health worker in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region:

"It is not what people are used to thinking it is: rescuing traditions, customs, traditional medicine, trying to combine them. It has to do with a balance between Western medicine and traditional medicine."

Roberto, a/k/a «Halcón» (Falcon), Mixtec and Nahuatl-tlatole Indian, popular educator (Costa Chica Region, Guerrero, Mexico):

"To get to the meaning of the word, we know there is a relationship among them, us, and you, and among them, us, and you we can find a point of equilibrium to be able to communicate with each other. We believe that interculturalism has to be understood as respect for the other, so that he can likewise respect us."

Dagma, Maya Mam Indian, health worker (Chiapas, Mexico):

"When you talk about interculturalism, it is how you look at things differently; it is how you feel, because these things emerge from the heart."

Mario, Mexican health worker:

"It is sharing experiences in life, health, and development among cultures."

Sofia, Mexican health worker:

"Well, I understand it as the interaction and acceptance of different knowledge, such as Western medicine and traditional medicine."

William, Nicaraguan health worker:

"Starting from the concept of health, I define interculturalism as physical, mental, and social wellbeing; lately, spiritual wellbeing has been added on. (...) From a perspective of interculturalism, we should take into account respect for the cultural diversity of native peoples, and value the lifestyles (worldview or cosmogony) of native people who preserve and maintain practices that make it possible to have a lifestyle in harmony with a community's surroundings: this way, a harmonious life and respect for the environment help to prevent disease.

"From the perspective of the treatment of illnesses and health services, interculturalism needs to be considered part of valuing and promoting some of the successful practices of native peoples, to restore harmony in the body and the environment."

Marvin, Inga Indian (Putumayo Valley, Colombia):

"We have seen that the general term 'interculturalism', which we have discussed for a long time, is defined in one way by some cultures and in other ways by others. For us, as indigenous peoples, we really believe it is like a web: we believe in a sense of belonging, and as native people, we want to give this term an important meaning, as it also encompasses that which is Latin American."

Claudemir, Brazilian health worker:

"I think interculturalism is an essential way for working with native peoples, Afro-descendants, and small farmers, because with interculturalism we are respecting their lifestyle, their mother tongue, and their traditional rituals. Without interculturalism, there would be no respect."

Byron, Afro-descendent Ecuadorean:

"With due respect for different concepts and opinions, I think, first of all, that interculturalism means RECOGNITION by the governing system of the EXISTENCE of each of the cultures or cultural expressions that are distinctive of ethnic groups, nationalities, and peoples that live under the political, social, cultural, economic, and other norms as established by that system. One of the roles of the ruling or dominant system is to erase from the memory of ethnic groups, nationalities, and peoples all sorts of cultural expressions, precisely because that is most efficient way to maintain control or domination over a society. That is, this recognition has not come without a price, much less spontaneously. It is the result of the resistance, steadfastness, and struggle of the native and Afro-descendent peoples of Abya Yala."

Risks in intercultural interpretation and practice

Andrea, Mexican health worker:

"Interculturalism involves the coexistence of several cultures in the same place, and the relationship that is formed among these cultural groups, which is not always egalitarian. Most of the time, there is one hegemonic culture that subjugates the rest, delegitimizing and excluding elements of the other culture(s) to differing degrees. (...) Thinking about interculturalism in health makes us think about other ways to access land and water, other ways to work and distribute resources, other ways of understanding the body and social relationships. It involves building a much more respectful, egalitarian, and fair world."

Mildred, Venezuelan health worker, specialist in audiovisual broadcasting:

"One way to understand interculturalism: it is a space or dimension for contact, where there is an exchange or recognition of the other who is not like me. (...) By recognizing the other person, or another group, I can generate interest in change, or in accompanying it. This is not necessarily what happens; thus, the recognition of this difference degenerates into inequities or wielding power, which may not be the best for the rest. I can recognize interculturalism and use it for empowerment, or I can recognize it, but see it as a liability. This can make all the difference."

Viviana, Bolivian communicator:

"To talk about interculturalism in health, we have to put the terms we use to discuss it on the table. Under what conditions do we want to engage in the hackneyed intercultural dialogue proposed by transnationals and other large corporations who look after their own interests? You cannot talk about interculturalism when conditions are unequal, when one is on a pedestal above the other, telling him what to do and how to do it.... Therefore, we need to defend an interculturalism that is critical, emancipating, where there is true respect for knowledge and wisdom that are different from homogenizing, capitalist medicine."

Roberto, a/k/a «Halcón» (Falcon), Mixtec and Nahuatl-tlatole Indian, popular educator (Costa Chica Region, Guerrero, Mexico):

"Within interculturalism, there are some factors that, perhaps, are not being taken into account: deculturation and acculturation, which come about through migration to the USA.... Young people do not share our ideas anymore or our way of thinking; therefore, their worldview is changing completely."

Ruth, Inga Indian and lawyer (Putumayo Valley, Colombia - Foundation of Indigenous Professionals):

"I still see [among the participants] a few that do not yet understand [the legacy of our ancestors]. I see some who really think it is like a kind of folklore; they have not felt in their hearts what we want to transmit, and until that happens, there is a lot more work to be done. That is why it is so hard; one wants the Rainbow to appear, but Taita Kuychi is not going to appear [yet]."

Interculturalism: still a mystery to be solved

Germán, Tzotzil Indian, and health worker in Chiapas State (Mexico):

"To me, interculturalism is a definition that seems okay, because it talks about all cultures, and how it comes about. I do not understand it well, yet...."

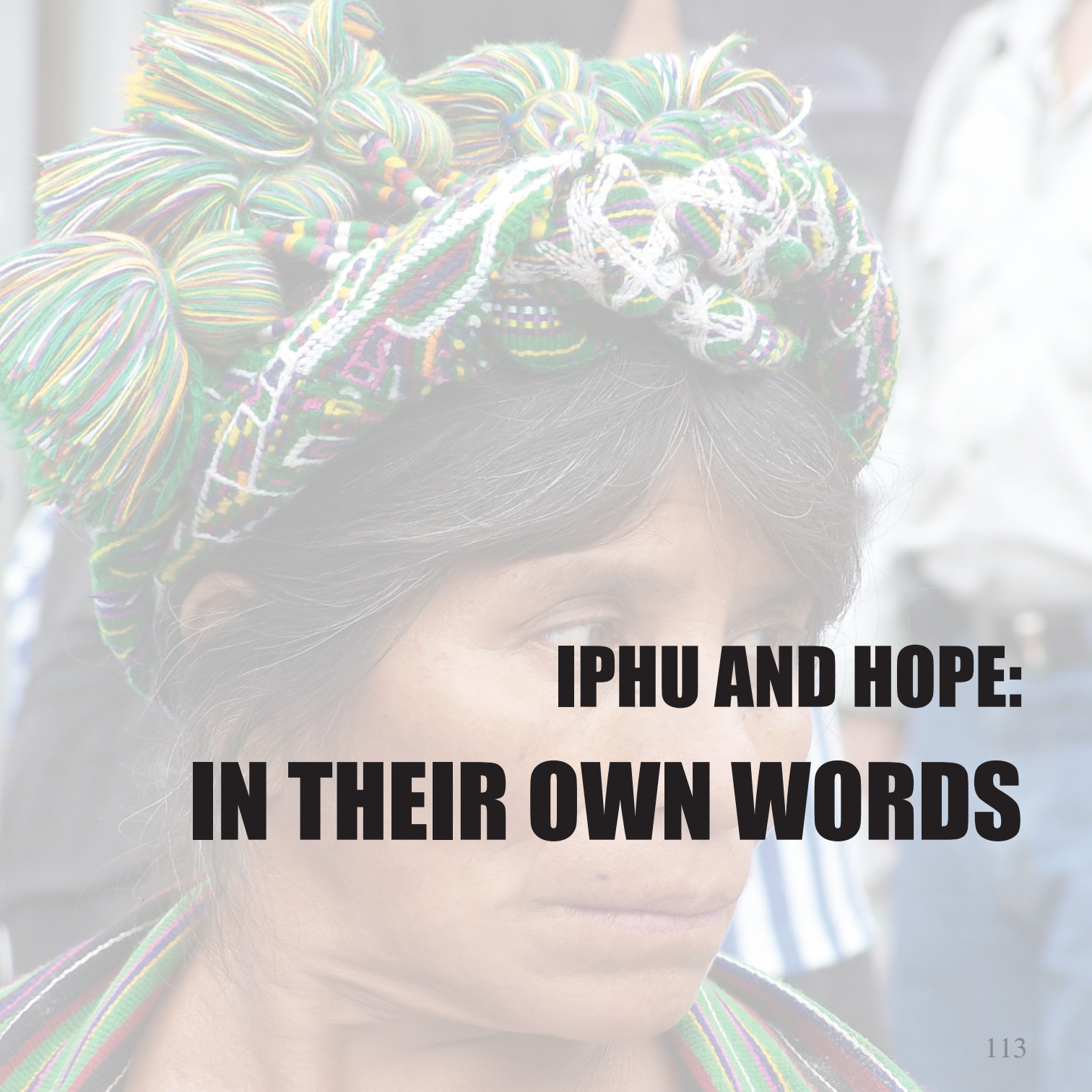
Wilman, Costa Rica:

"How can a cultural health system be offered in a multicultural setting? (...) My sector is the largest indigenous sector in the country. (...) There are 14,000 indigenous people on the reservation. (...) The number of indigenous people that are professionals and leaders is not great: that is why the [health] system is still not up to snuff. So, what can be done so that as a health professional one can deal with the issue from the point of view of interculturalism? This is what I have not been able to do yet. Because, if I have a concept for interculturalism and I impose it on them, I would be doing the same thing, I would also be violating their rights. This is what I really do not understand right now."

Ana Valencia, Vera Cruz State (Mexico):

"In health everything has to be integrated. (...) So, I am more or less taking them something that is along their line of work, which is like a variety of things. (...) I have to visit them and pass on the little I have been able to understand, because I do not understand much. Well, I am going to give it to them and see what comes of it."





IPHU AND HOPE:
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Pablo, Uruguay:

"This experience is going to enable me to work not only with reason and knowledge, but also with feeling. And this is going to deepen my work and help it go where it needs to go."

Abad, Vera Cruz (Mexico):

"First it will help me to share experiences, and I feel I am learning new methodological tools, new health concepts, new ways that other experiences in Latin America, in Central America, are looking at and dealing with health. (...) Strengthening practices is not enough, we must also offer health models and systems."

Santiago, Buenos Aires (Argentina):

"We were talking among people from all over Latin America, and some very interesting things came up. This is a great bonus to me, the way people bring knowledge, work experiences that you do not learn in medical school or academic settings."

Claudemir, Brazil:

"What we take from here gives us more strength to continue working in my own country."

Alta Gracia, Santo Domingo:

"It is going to give me a great deal of support, because this community work is precisely what we want to strengthen. It is empowerment of the community, so they become responsible for creating a responsible lifestyle. It does not matter what we do as NGOs. (...) In this regard, I have learned a lot from the native peoples. (...) We have community health workers, but they do not have the level of training that I have seen here."

Yonathan, Venezuela:

"First of all, it helps me appreciate what I have at home. Second, it reinforces things that I see that are not so positive in my country. And then, I will try to link up to the network, because in the sexual diversity group, this is necessary."

Leticia, Guatemala:

"This seminar is very important to me, because we are learning about the struggles that are going on in other countries. It has not been easy to practice our own cultural health practices in our country. I think that this helps us to analyze our situation in another way, which is reflected in our comrades' struggle. This has helped to enrich my knowledge, which will help me in the training workshops here."

David, Nicaragua (North Atlantic Region):

"The IPHU experience has been enormous for me. I have another outlook on health: I thought comprehensive health was the focus,

the traditional part, but I had never looked at it as Mother Earth. It means that Mother Earth, the giver of life, must be respected. I never noticed. Now I know that comprehensive health does not only have to do with the physical or mental part, but it has to do with everything around us."

Roberto 'Halcón' (Mexico):

"It is making me stronger, because when I listen to other experiences I realize that I am not walking by myself, and that we are not off course."

Germán, Chiapas:

"I am taking some messages from here ... about what we still have yet to do back home, and I will share them will my colleagues. I am grateful to the IPHU for giving me the opportunity to come here."

Ruth, Colombia (Putumayo):

"It seems to me the work of the IPHU and the People's Health Movement are good steps toward humanizing the planet, which has to come about some day—fruitful work to help Mother Earth stop bleeding."

Dany, Chile (Region VIII):

"What we have learned from the IPHU is the need to train community health workers. This is one of the ideas and proposals we are taking back to implement in the Mapuche region, to improve the quality of health. I believe we have unlearned certain things that were necessary. I think we have more than reached the objectives proposed by the IPHU. Somehow we managed to come together, to find joy, to find spirituality, to find strategies, and we are going to use these back home. Therefore, I want to thank the IPHU, ASECSA, and the organizers. We are happy, really very happy for what they have done with us: strengthening our culture, showing us the Guatemalan indigenous movement. It was an honour to listen to comrade Quizhpe give his talk; he is a focal point in the Latin American indigenous struggle and it was an honour to have participated, to have supported the march of our fellow indigenous people in Guatemala. (...) Keep fighting for our lives, for our Mother Earth, for nature. You have my deepest gratitude.

Mildred, Venezuela:

"*In the beginning, I had a more romantic and naive way of seeing interculturalism. But, what I am gathering now is the result of many days of not only sharing theoretical opinions and experiences, but in the room with my fellow students, over lunch, I had a whole number of discussions that, I feel, have provided input about this version that I had*

about interculturalism. This is going to enable me to contextualize this exchange with the people at work. I really like the work the PHM is doing. I wish they would publicize it among young people so that they can push this work forward even more strongly."

Viviana, Bolivia:

"*Participating, living the Maya worldview, I confirm the feeling of brotherhood that emerges among the children of the earth; although we have different skin colour, different languages, and we were born in different places, we feel close, spiritually united by the love of Mother Earth. This alone helps me, not only as a health professional, but as a person; part of the living fabric that connects us beyond what we imagine.*"

Gabriel, Chiapas:

«I think, now that the IPHU is over, that we have strengthened the bonds between the participants, between their organizations and the movements they come from. There is more openness. This diversity that we the native peoples talk about, really has to do with a greater, respectful diversity. Regardless of whether someone is part of a native group or not, whether someone has a specific sexual preference or not, this is not a barrier to strengthening a network, to building better living conditions for many peoples.»

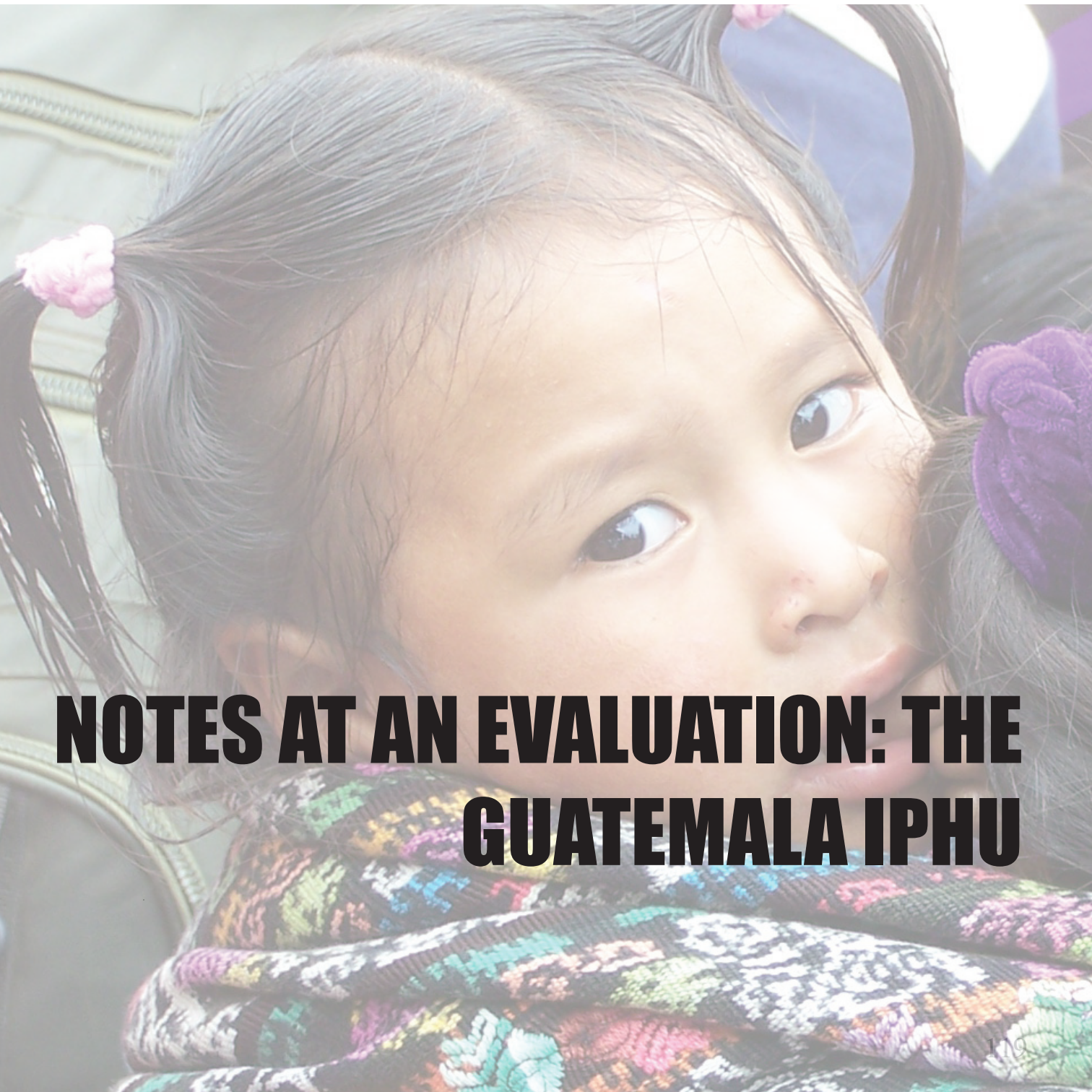
Byron, Afro-descendent Ecuadorean:

"*With the rich IPHU experience in Guatemala, I was able to assimilate, and therefore understand, that before taking on any social, political, or development project in indigenous, peasant, or Afro-descendent communities, one has to start by studying, learning, and practicing the concepts about life that community members have, their customs, their dietary traditions, their religiousness, or as they call it, their worldview.*"




De venta aquí
Arte





NOTES AT AN EVALUATION: THE GUATEMALA IPHU

The first Guatemalan IPHU course, "Intercultural Health: Perspectives from the Indigenous and Afro-Descendent Peoples of Abya Yala," ended on 24 April 2010. The host city, Chimaltenango, near Guatemala City, the capital, was witness to the event, since many of the sessions were broadcast over local radio stations. The Association of Community Health Services (ASECSA), the location and an integral part of the course, organized the closing ceremony, led by Maya spiritual guides, who had also led a similar welcoming ceremony on 14 April.

Thus, people who had built a highly developed civilization and then suffered a bloody and savage genocide at the hands of the Spanish invaders, gave of their most prized possession, their spirituality, in sharing their ancient rituals and knowledge that they have jealously guarded down through the generations.

After the ceremony, it was time to take stock of all that happened during ten days of intense work by students, teachers, facilitators, and organizers. This evaluation touched on several aspects, summarized here:

Interculturalism is at very different stages of discussion in Latin America, depending on the country. While Bolivia and Ecuador have been dealing with the issue for the last three decades, with the result that their identity as Multinational States is now enshrined in their country's constitutions, others continue the debate, and a good number of societies know little or nothing about this issue.

At the IPHU, interculturalism could be seen as a dialogue among all the participants from the different social groups—indigenous, Afro-descendent, white, mestizo, and more—forming the ethnic and cultural mosaic that is our people.

This process includes the urgency for us to decolonize our thoughts and actions, in order to develop egalitarian relationships as a fundamental part of the exchange of ideas we are promoting.

Sexual minorities, marginal groups, and others, should also participate in this process, since they have their own understanding and experiences to contribute, in some cases new to the modern world we live in.

The cultural richness of the peoples and nations of Latin America and their intimate knowledge of their physical surroundings hold enormous potential for primary health care in general, even for people with illnesses thought to be peculiar to our times.

The historical process that produced ethnic territories, which were dismembered or fragmented by the invasion, includes the vital need to start down the road to rebuilding them in the here and now. These physical units contain the interconnected elements of 'living well' (suma qamaña in Aymara), attained through meeting the most important needs of social beings, their worldview, and culture, which are none other than that special relationship that people establish with

the natural setting in which they live and have lived.

Given the importance of interculturalism, our discussion of it should no longer focus solely on the health area; it is a cross-cutting theme permeating all aspects of our societies, including being a determinant of the prospects for social change.

Therefore, it is clear that we must build bridges linking culture and politics. Or, to put it differently, elevate cultural categories and how they are experienced to the level of political discourse and action.

Finally, it is important to note that the organizers used a rigorous selection process to winnow the 310 course applicants down to 50 (the number of slots available) from 17 Latin American countries. All the sessions were marked by organization and discipline, and the days would end with cultural activities lasting into the wee hours.

Because of all that we learned and shared, all that each of the participants brought with them and took home, we close with our warm thoughts, until the next IPHU, while backstage we see the Third People's Health Assembly starting to take shape.



ComunicándoNOS team

When arriving at the Guatemalan City airport, one must take certain precautions, especially if you are from Ecuador and have long hair. First, and very important, is to not open your mouth and say that you are coming to an indigenous event. The local immigration agents find this quite suspect. We confirmed this when our colleague, Patricio, was detained for almost an hour for 'routine questioning'.

Once we got past this 'small impasse', we continued with our challenge—to figure out what interculturalism is from the perspective of native and black peoples, and to try to transmit through the collective production of a book and three videos, the ideas, concepts, dreams, feelings, views, and thoughts of 65 delegates from around Latin America gathered together in the magic of Guatemala.

Before we left for Guatemala, we had discussed, argued, and researched the topic on the Internet, in a couple of books, a lot of articles. But mostly the conversations and guidance we got from Jaime and Dominique were our main sources of information, though we were convinced that the 'material' was sufficient for getting us involved in the event, in direct contact and conversation with the communities.

Once the team was complete—Santiago and Silvina came from Argentina and Virgilio from Nicaragua—we started by identifying some key people. We met Edy and Carlos from Guatemala who would become our arms, eyes, feet, and hands. We also learned some magical words: refacción, embriagante, mero, cabal. So, a mid-morning refacción is just the thing, particularly if you haven't eaten breakfast. And, throwing back a couple of embriagantes was also cabal for helping us to work the night away.

As we got involved in the event we rediscovered the extent of our work as communicators, which is more than just recording everything. Little by little we developed connections and shared sentiments and found that natural, spontaneous communication that native peoples keep alive; that communication that relates one to everyone—one to another, the other to many others, to us, and us to others. Therefore, when we communicated, when we did 'interviews', recordings, or 'reporting', we felt that we were not speaking of the other, but rather of ourselves. We were not talking about the people of Guatemala; we were talking about our Abya-Yala.

Jorge Quizhpe



Jaime Hidrovo (Ecuador):
Research, interviews, and reporting.

Dominique Gomis (Franc):
Research, interviews, and reporting.



Jorge Quizhpe (Ecuador):
Team coordinator, photography, and videography.



Silvina Alessio (Argentina):
Photography and videography.
Video editing.



Patricio Matute (Ecuador):
Videography and interviews.



Santiago Ameigeiras (Argentina):
Photography.



Virgilio Medina (Nicaragua):
Webmaster.

PARTICIPANTES











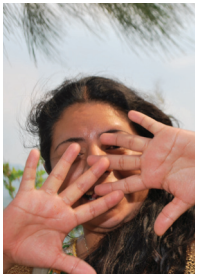







































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